





# ***Last Voyage***

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# LAST VOYAGE



# *Last Voyage*

WARREN ARMSTRONG

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# I.

## *Fact and Fantasy*

WHEREVER seafaring men get together, someone, sometime, invariably starts a fresh topic of conversation by asking: "What *exactly* happened to ——?" And it is a safe bet, providing some old-timer is among the company, that a story follows; a story which, in its time down the years, has had half a dozen variations—and not one of them proved factually correct.

It is, maybe, a rare prerogative of seafarers; for though modern seamen are certainly less superstitious than their predecessors, most of them still believe that certain vessels were "hoodoo." For in every ship that sailed or still sails the Seven Seas, there exists a "feeling" between her and the men who serve her—and not always a feeling of affection, at that; for a man can hate his ship more than he ever hated a fellow man.

A ship can hate men, and when she does that she becomes hoodoo—a killer ship. In the spacious days of sail, old-timers say, such ships killed men voyage after voyage. There were strange stories woven around those vessels—stories passed down from generation to generation

among seamen, to prove that there was justification for what might otherwise be regarded as fantastic.

Seafaring men are not easy talkers. They never were. And they do not ask anyone to believe the things they believe about certain ships. All they know is that "incidents" have happened, and will always happen, to ships and their crews; things for which the scientific mind has no practical name or explanation.

They quote instances and hard facts; cases like that of the Australian Government-owned 4,000-ton freighter, *Sumatra*. On the morning of her departure, a crew spokesman sought an interview with her captain and begged him to delay sailing for twenty-four hours, no more and no less. The master refused. He took his ship out, shaped his course, and settled down to what he believed would be a totally uneventful voyage. Two days later, though, her radio call sign and an indecipherable message were picked up by a shore station. She was never heard of again. She just disappeared. Through her radio she had tried to tell the listening world something, though precisely what it was nobody will ever know.

There was the case of the London-owned steamship *Anglo-Australian*. She, too, achieved an uneventful voyage as far as the Azores, maintaining constant radio contact with ships and shore stations until one fateful morning in March, 1938. On that day, after her voice had been heard loud and clear, she vanished forever, without trace.

Drama and to spare. Stories and facts seamen speak of in subdued voices; and for which they can find no real explanation.

Around the time *Anglo-Australian* provided yet

another mystery story, on February 10, 1938, from the United States Marine Radio headquarters came a flash: "There is no word from the Liverpool steamship *Maria de Larrinaga*. A previous report that survivors had been taken on board the Holland-America liner *Veendam* is believed to be due to an error in wireless transmission."

The vessel had sailed from Houston, Texas, for Cobh, Eire, with a cargo of grain. She was under the capable command of Captain T. Cochlin, with a crew of British officers and engineers and thirty-seven lascars. She was due in the Mersey on Tuesday, February 14; but on the night of Wednesday, February 8, she radioed: "SOS. In sinking condition. Number 1 hatch stove in. Immediate assistance required."

Lashed by furious Atlantic weather, four ships raced to the rescue. The 15,450-ton *Veendam* was 200 miles distant; the 5,152-ton American freighter *Scanmail* was 280 miles off; the Cunard-White Star 13,984-ton *Aurania* and the 81,235-ton *Queen Mary* also picked up the call for help and changed course. Thomaston, Maine, Mackay Radio station put out an urgent call to all ships and shore stations in the vicinity: "Please stand by. This ship has more than thirty-five men aboard. For their safety suspend all radio telegraph signals."

Twelve hours passed; then came the three-word flash: "*Veendam* making rescue"; and immediately afterwards, another flash: "Report now appears erroneous." *Maria de Larrinaga* and her crew had gone forever from the sight of man, and nobody could say exactly why, or hazard a guess as to what had overwhelmed her.

Notorious among the world's oceans is the North Atlantic; *notorious for everything*. It is the one vast expanse

of salt water that has provided more mysteries than any other.

There was the freighter *Dunmore*, a well-found ship capable of logging her comfortable passage between the Old and New Worlds indefinitely. And then, down to her load line with a full cargo, she left Avonmouth bound for Newfoundland, made heavy weather, lost her propeller, and took a severe battering from giant seas. When the weather moderated three days later, her master ordered a signal to be made reporting his intention of abandoning ship. The boats were lowered and manned, the *Dunmore* left adrift; she could not, reported her captain, "possibly remain afloat for longer than another hour or two."

Ninety days later, however, the United States Lines express ship *St. Louis*, making an easy twenty knots in good weather, sighted the "lost" freighter and indeed was nearly rammed by the abandoned ship. Two weeks later, two North Atlantic liners put towlines aboard the "lost" *Dunmore*; and for no known reason, those lines were "slipped"—*from the Dunmore's end*. An International Ice Patrol cutter was ordered to seek her out and destroy her on sight as a constant danger to transatlantic shipping. The cutter returned to her base reporting her failure to find the freighter. Four months later three liners reported having sighted her; six months later still she was seen off the Grand Banks. She became a legend of the Atlantic, a hoodoo ship. In 1946, the 5,438-ton American freighter *Winding Gulf*, heading for Boston, Massachusetts, steaming dead slow in fog, her siren wailing warning to all other vessels in the area, was in collision with an unknown ship.

The American made port without further mishap, went into dry dock, and was examined by surveyors. They reported there was little doubt she had "been in collision with a vessel which, judging from the damage she had done to the *Winding Gulf's* hull, had been lying very low in the water, either waterlogged or with a heavy, bulk cargo." Was it the lost *Dunmore*, after all those years? Nobody could say, for no other vessel reported a collision that week.

The Italian North Atlantic liner *Utopia* was another instance of hoodoo. Hers was a strange story indeed. Outward bound, she collided violently with H.M.S. *Anson* and foundered with heavy loss of life among her emigrant passengers. Salvaged, she was refitted, given a new certificate of seaworthiness, replaced on the service; but as she passed the scene of disaster, her officers, crew, and most of her passengers swore they heard "voices of the dead." *Utopia* was withdrawn quietly and sold to the shipbreakers long before her time.

There was the *Golden Fleece*, as fine a sailing ship as any seaman would wish to serve in. In Boston she took aboard a full cargo, bound for Indian ports; then she caught fire two days out. Turning back, she docked in Boston, where the city fire fighters brought all their resources to bear, but without success. It was decided to scuttle the *Golden Fleece*; her sea cocks were opened and down she went. And up she came again, burning more furiously than ever. That went on for a full week . . . and someone remembered the legend that her owner had put a curse on her: "If ever she sails for Indian waters, her cargo, whatever it may be, shall burn until the ship is purged!"

Almost simultaneously with the bitter experience of the Boston fire fighters, at sunset on January 24, 1852, the clipper ship *Nelson*, due to sail the following noon for Britain, swung lazily at anchor in Hobson's Bay, close by Port Melbourne's famous Town Pier. At midnight the vessel had gone.

Three hundred and twenty successful prospectors from the alluvial goldfields had booked passage in her for the long return voyage to Britain. That fateful night all but three of them went ashore for a final leave-taking spree. And, sometime between sunset and midnight, those three passengers with the crew disappeared from sight forever. How, why, or where nobody ever knew. But, by some means which he refused to divulge, Aaron Semple, a seaman, returned to Melbourne in a ship's boat, climbed ashore on the Williamstown breakwater, was arrested, tried, imprisoned for three months, and later given employment in the Melbourne Port Department.

In the cemetery at Williamstown there is a lonely grave, with its headstone: "Aaron Semple, seaman. Sole survivor of the clipper ship *Nelson*." Just that and nothing more. Since Semple was buried, in November, 1898, that brief epitaph has cloaked a strange story; the story of a fine ship and her cargo of gold which vanished in the night hours and was never seen again.

Into the Oshawa County Hospital in the summer of 1932 went a Canadian seaman, John Noble; he was gravely ill and was placed on the danger list. That same evening Noble called to a nurse, produced a badly faded copy of Lloyd's List, and said he wished to make a sworn statement. His testimony was to the effect that he

“ . . . became a member of the crew of the steamship *Waratab*” and that “shortly after leaving Durban the ship developed a heavy list. Among my mates were some ready to mutiny, but I refused to join them. Then, at four o’clock on the morning of July 23, 1909, while I was on watch, I discovered the ten-year-old daughter of a well-known and wealthy English family; she was crying in the shelter of a deck ventilator. Suddenly, as I approached the child, the ship rolled heavily to starboard, and we were both thrown into the sea. We managed to struggle ashore and at last reached East London.”

South African police records proved that a stranger was, in fact, seen with a small girl wandering about East London early in August, 1909, but they disappeared before the man was questioned as to his identity. And with the death of Noble in the Oshawa County Hospital the world lost the last probable link with that ill-fated 9,000-ton *Waratab*, which had sailed from Durban in the middle of July, 1909, for East London en route for Cape Town and England, and somehow was swallowed up by the hungry seas, nobody quite knew why. In July, 1939, at Kei Mouth, once again the vessel became brief news when a report was received that baulks of sea-worm timber, claimed by experts to be wreckage of the *Waratab*, were washed ashore.

The reinsurance rates quoted by Lloyd’s underwriters on the German cadet ship *Admiral Karpfanger*, formerly the four-masted Finnish bark *L’Avenir*, advanced sharply in April, 1938, to 90 per cent—a grim omen, for it meant “no hope.” She was bound for the United Kingdom from South Australia, with a full cargo of grain, but nothing

was heard of her after she reported her position five hundred miles off the coast of New Zealand; her message: "All well making good weather with calm seas."

Her passing in mysterious circumstances reminded seafaring men the world over of the case of another cadet ship, *Kobenhavn*, last of the world-famous five-masted barks, which sailed from Buenos Aires on December 14, 1928, bound for Melbourne. Aboard her were forty-five young Danish cadets and a crew of fifteen; her course lay across the Southern Ocean, through the Roaring Forties. For 120 days no word came from the vessel. Then—Lloyd's reinsurance rate soared to 90 per cent.

A British ship, *Halesius*, calling at Tristan da Cunha, subsequently reported that the islanders of Tristan had sighted a five-masted ship and watched her drift offshore for three memorable hours. Only a jib was set. Not a sign of life could be seen aboard. No wreckage was found during a later search; but seven skeletons, found lying beside the rotted remnants of a ship's lifeboat on desolate sand dunes on the African coast, provided perhaps the only clue to the fate of the cadets, the crew, and that stately wind ship. Pieces of faded blue cloth proved that the men had been seamen.

It was on June 1, 1893, that the schooner *Star*, with a crew of thirteen, sailed from the Aleutians with a cargo of oil, timber, and skins. On the night of June 17, off Midway Island, she ran into a squall, struck on the Lizianski Shoals, lost her foremast, and had her mainmast fractured below the crosstrees. For twelve hours her crew fought desperately to keep her afloat, jettisoning the cargo. At sundown next day they abandoned her, got away in a lifeboat, watched as the *Star* appeared to sink.



Three days later the lifeboat was sighted by the Glasgow-owned four-masted bark *Ecclefechan*, and the shipwrecked crew landed safely at Puget Sound, whence they later made their way to San Francisco.

On June 21, the British bark *Doon* in good weather sighted the *Star*, obviously none the worse for her experiences; Captain Boyd, master of the *Doon*, reported seeing the schooner on reaching San Francisco. Three months later, four hundred miles due west of the Golden Gate, roughly nine hundred miles from the Lizards Shoals, the *Star* was sighted by the American tanker *Pocahontas*; thereafter, she was reported from Fanning Island, the cable station eleven hundred miles south of Honolulu. She was then roughly three thousand miles from her position *reported more than one year previously*. Eighteen months later a sloop of the Royal Navy sighted the *Star* hard on a shoal in the Phoenix Group; she had managed to sail a distance of more than six thousand miles, unmanned.

It was John Masefield who once wrote, of the sailing ship *Wanderer*: "She is a thing of great beauty, but of strange dooms." Masefield might well have written similarly of a score of other vessels; ships like the *Mary Celeste*, whose strange tragedy has never been explained. If ever there were a ship dogged by hoodoo it was the *Mary Celeste*; and strange incidents happened to her long after she provided the world with its greatest mystery of the Seven Seas.

Months after she was found, in 1872, with sails set and a meal laid untouched in her cabin, she was imprisoned in Venezuela through silting up of the river fairway, and during that period at least one murder was committed on

board. Her mate disappeared mysteriously; a seaman killed himself. She was later arrested for debt in the West Indies. In 1889, in Texas, her crew elected to go to jail rather than remain on her, claiming that she was haunted. They said that at night "invisible rope's ends . . . or *things like the tentacles of an octopus* . . . lashed them about the face and body." A strange coincidence, maybe, for one of the main theories put forward to explain the disappearance of her crew during that unexplained tragedy in the Atlantic was that "some such monster of the deep had attacked the ship, overwhelming her master and entire crew."

The *Mary Celeste* ended her strange life off the Cuban coast in 1896, abandoned. Her wreck, roughly three hundred miles from the normal track she should have taken, was examined carefully by surveyors concerned with insurance. They discovered that, with the exception of the top casks in her hold, containing molasses, the rest of her freight was sea water. Subsequently her captain and owner were arrested and sentenced to eight years in a South Carolina jail for barratry.

Seamen, and none should know better, might well claim that certain ships sailed under a hoodoo and went to their tragic end that way. Scientists and other practical-minded folk put forward varied solutions to what seem to be insoluble problems concerning ships and the men who serve in them. Oceanologists suggest that every so often Dame Nature has an unpleasant way of throwing her weight about; that some natural cataclysm has overwhelmed ships, or that some vast natural "safety valve" might have burst and sent ships to the sea bed, leaving no

trace of the tragedy that caught up with them as they went their way across the world's oceans.

In 1938, the year when four vessels, including the *Anglo-Australian* and the *Maria de Larrinaga*, were lost for no known reason, a giant meteor missed the world's surface by the astronomical hair's breadth of 400,000-odd miles, or five and a half hours time distance. Astronomers said that had it hit the earth there would have been a crater one mile deep and fifty miles in diameter, a hole so vast that the Cunarder *Queen Mary*, if placed in it, would have looked like a minnow in a goldfish bowl; that had the celestial body crashed into the North Atlantic it would have created a tidal wave large enough to submerge Great Britain. That may well be. The fact remains that in the North Atlantic, on the recognized liner routes, ships of more than 20,000 tons have been struck by mountainous seas reaching a height of sixty feet and have lived through the savage experience of what Nature *can* do at times.

Oceanographers recognize three major divisions of the world's water surface: the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Indian Oceans. Of the three the Pacific is largest and deepest, extending from the Bering Strait in the north to Antarctica in the south, a distance of 8,350 nautical miles or 9,630 land miles. East to west it is bounded on the one hand by North and South America, on the other by Asia and Australia; between Panama and Mindanao in the Philippines lie 9,300 nautical miles, nearly 10,600 land miles, of seas unbroken by any land.

Average depth of the Pacific is 2,342 fathoms, or more than 14,000 feet; east of the meridian 150 degrees the

depth is remarkably uniform, but the western half contains numerous "deeps" or "trenches," and in these are found the greatest depths of water ever plumbed.

Average depth of the Indian Ocean is 2,167 fathoms, almost exactly 13,000 feet; 20 fathoms, or 120 feet, more than the average depth of the Atlantic. But the North Atlantic possesses submarine mountain ranges far higher, far deeper, and immensely longer than either of the other two recognized world oceans; and it is a combination of water movement, or ocean swell, partly caused by submarine ranges, and of wind blowing in the same direction as that in which the swell is moving, that piles up the seas to such vast heights.

In a strong gale or heavy swell, the height of waves does not usually exceed forty or fifty feet, though much greater heights have been recorded; in December, 1922, the White Star liner *Majestic* recorded waves more than seventy feet high during a storm in the North Atlantic. In the area of the Bay of Biscay, sixty-foot-high waves have been logged; in the spring of 1928, the liner *Leviathan* was struck by a solid mass of water which wrecked the searchlight on the foremast, eighty-five feet above the liner's water line; the wave smashed four lifeboats and did considerable other damage to the ship. And a year later, in 1929, the German liner *Bremen* reported during the terrific storm of that period waves to the height of sixty feet, 480 feet long, and a wind force reaching more than 115 miles an hour.

Wind and wave carry their own threat to ships, but, so far as the North Atlantic shipping routes are concerned, fog and ice, alone or in combination, remain the nightmare of every seafaring man. The oceans will never change;

one day a mirror to the clear blue skies above, the next a whirling vortex of terror, the winds shrieking in devastating fury, the skies blue, black, then mottled. To the seafarer, the world at times like that seems to rise up and shake itself.

A ship sheds her propeller; a freighter radios she had collided with an "unseen object" and now has engine trouble, drifting perilously on the liner tracks; maybe a tanker broadcasts that fearful call "Fire!" And then, these days, wherever there is trouble, the calls are answered: "Coming to your assistance with all speed." Four-thousand-horsepower engines begin turning, and one or more of the squat, single-funneled ocean-going salvage tugs move out from base. The job is to reach the disabled vessel and get it back safely to port. At Lloyd's, London, they call it "No cure, no pay." It is a job that calls for split-second timing and more individual courage than any one man can conceivably possess.

In the following chapters, then, are set down, freely dramatized but based upon ice-cold fact, the stories of upward of a dozen shipwrecks—a dozen stories which will never fail to tear at the human heartstrings or to excite the imagination of shore folk; or, for that matter, continue to be the theme when seafaring men get together and someone starts a fresh topic of conversation by asking: "What *exactly* happened to the old ——?"

## 2.

### South Pacific Nightmare

A FULL seventy years before *Mayflower I*, fishermen from Europe were taking their stocky little craft to sea, sweeping the oceans for good food; their activities, in fact, laid the foundations of modern-world whaling. Kipling in his *Captains Courageous* immortalized these men who opened up the Arctic Ocean; who dared the worst weather off the Grand Banks, where they snared giant squid useful as bait. And in those cold wastes of sea, thirty years after *Mayflower* achieved her epic voyage, around 1650, the New Englanders discovered to their astonishment that the squid was focal point of the beady eyes of the whale, which one New England deep-sea fisherman described as "mighty creatures which spew seawater like smoke from a chimney!"

So they turned their attention to the whale, hunting it first more for sheer adventure than as a likely profitable catch; and many a stout little ship with her gallant crew was taken in tow by the monsters to their doom. But they brought the whales in to Cape Cod, cut them apart, cut steaks from the monsters, cooked those steaks, and—a trifle dubious—tasted them. It was a strange but pleasant

dish, more so when it was accompanied by plenty of onions.

Here was good food; here, too—and this they discovered by accident—was oil obtained from the blubber, and it could be used to light lamps. From the great head of the sperm species they extracted a strange, waxy substance, hard, translucent, pearly white in color; for a while it puzzled them. A local ships' chandler experimented with it and produced candles; this was spermacetti. In the intestines they found a gray-colored substance, almost like grained marble, with a not unpleasant odor. And, in the mouth of a "right" whale, they puzzled their brains over the curious frayed-out "plates," experimented with these, too.

So they proved that there was a lot more than mere adventure in hunting whales; that the monsters could provide them with almost unlimited supplies of good meat; that from its carcass treated in crude "kettles," they could extract oil to light their lamps; that the strange gray substance could be used to make perfume; finally, that the "teeth" gave a product useful for dressmakers. The whale had, in fact, arrived on the world's commercial map; this "monstrous creature of the deep" was worth all the combined value of the herring, cod, halibut, and bluefish they had once netted. It provided meat, oil, whalebone, fertilizers; in terms of hard cash it could bring real prosperity to shipbuilders all along the Atlantic seaboard.

They plowed profits back into shipyards, built a fleet of whalers, three hundred of them manned by nearly four thousand tough sailormen, sent them out hunting from Boston, Salem, Newburyport, from every harbor along the Atlantic coast. Shipbuilders, caskmakers, makers of

hand harpoons, chandlers, and ropemakers enjoyed new prosperity—but a price had to be paid in human lives. So the whalers built small chapels along the shore, and around those simple little pulpits engraved the names of shipmates who helped pay that price. Never a whaler sailed before her crew first attended service, sang their simple, homely hymns, paid silent tribute to shipmates “who went before us, never to return.” Then they sailed into the frozen wastes, eager to pit sinew and brawn against the monsters, knowing to a man that their calling carried the threat of sudden death.

Such a whaler was the *Essex*, well-found, well victualled, which sailed from Nantucket in 1819 with a crew of thirty under Captain Pollard and First Mate Chase; and it was the firm intention of the skipper to take his ship on this particular voyage not into the Far North, but south to the Antarctic and around the Horn into the Pacific. A month after leaving her home port, the *Essex* sailed calmly a full thousand miles off the South American coast, making about five knots, when Chase yelled: “A sperm! And the biggest I ever seen!”

It was a giant, every inch of one hundred feet long and weighing, Pollard calculated, all of that number of tons too. It was a catch which would open the eyes of every man, woman, and child back home.

“Clear three boats, Mister Chase, and man ’em. I’ll take one, the two others go with the bo’sun and the lamp trimmer. You’ll please take charge aboard, Mister, and stand by ready to haul in once we harpoon this creature.” They were away, pulling on their long oars, the harpooners ready in the bows—ready to strike. Then the big sperm



flicked its vast tail fin above the seas, rolled lazily, and disappeared from sight.

A moment later it surfaced, not more than a cable's length from the *Essex*, reared its great head as if sighting its quarry, settled in the seas, and drove headlong at the whaler, striking her forward of the high bows. It brought the *Essex* to a violent standstill, left her shaking like an aspen, hit her a second blow, dived right under the ship, scraping the keel, and surfaced to port, apparently stunned.

Chase yelled: "She's badly holed, you men! Get them pumps a-working fast as you can, go and ditch the water out of her or we're lost!"

They manhandled the pumps like demons, kicking out the watery menace, called encouragement to each other, and as they strained muscles they watched the three ship's boats at the mercy of the monster should it turn and attack them.

But the big sperm changed its mind, veered away from Captain Pollard's boat after the skipper had driven his harpoon into the great head, and charged again at the *Essex*, threshing the seas as it came on, jaws opening in frenzy. Chase saw it coming: "He's at us again, men. There's no sense working those pumps. Run for your lives!"

He took hold of the wheel, wrenched it hard astarboard in an effort to get out of range; but the ship was heavy with seas and failed to answer to the helm. She lay there supine as the sperm hit her bows, crushed them like paper, passed right under the ship a second time, and surfaced almost beside the three boats. A second harpoon was driven into its head. Then it disappeared.

"Get the last boat clear and lower it, there's not a minute to lose." Chase grabbed a couple of quadrants, Pollard's books of navigation, compasses, and a meager store of provisions. And as he climbed into the boat, the whaler rolled over on her beam, waterlogged, but failed to sink lower than her deck; her oil cargo and empty barrels kept her afloat on the surface, only her masts showing, bare as the branches of a tree in midwinter.

Pollard's boat returned to join Chase with his boat's crew, came alongside the whaler, and looked her over.

"Mister Chase, we'll board her, cut our way through her decking, get down to the storeroom, and take all we can in stores and water. We're maybe about two thousand miles from land, and it'll be tough going." He checked his bearings, logged them as longitude 120 degrees west, almost on the equator; he pored over a chart, poked a stocky forefinger on a point: "As I thought, Mister Chase—the Marquesas is our best, our only, hope; we'll make for them, and *we sail with God*."

"Amen to that, Cap'n. But I know the islands, and I know the reefs around them, and there're savages there, at that. So even if we ever reach them, even if we beach our boats, likely as not we'll meet death at the hands of cannibals!"

"That risk we'll tackle, Chase, when we get there."

Thus began one of the most fearful chapters of human suffering in the annals of shipwreck. Three nights after leaving the submerged *Essex*, which had yielded through her shorn decks around six hundred pounds of bread and two hundred gallons of fresh water, now stored equally among the four lifeboats, Captain Pollard's boat was attacked by the same giant sperm, and only by superhuman

efforts was it righted. Thirty-two days later, with bread and drinking water exhausted, the crew more than half-starved and their throats parched and sere, they sighted land, crawled ashore, and lay on burning sands ready—eager, some of them—to die.

For another week, snaring small fish, crushing leaves from trees for food, they managed to exist. On December 31 Pollard mustered his men and told them he intended putting to sea again “to try our luck.”

“No use, nor hope, trying, Cap’n. There’s no chance out there afloat. There are three of us who elect to stay here rather than leave. We reckon there’s as much chance to live, maybe more, on land.”

Pollard, Chase, and the others sailed away two days later, heading this time for Juan Fernandez, a full twenty-five hundred miles distant. Ten days later they sewed the body of the second mate in canvas and committed him to the deep. On the morning of January 10 First Mate Chase and his boat had disappeared from sight. On January 29 only Captain Pollard’s boat and its crew of near-skeletons was left. One by one the skipper’s men died and were buried until, by the end of February, only Pollard himself and a grotesque specimen of manhood were left alive. At dawn next day they were sighted and picked up by a Nantucket whaler commanded by Captain Zimri Coffin, carried carefully aboard, snugged down in spare bunks, and nursed slowly back to life by seamen who knew the nightmare these pitiable sailormen had lived through. Pollard held a service in memory of the twenty-eight officers and men he had lost on that tragic voyage. But he held it too soon—for, returning to Nantucket, he was welcomed by three survivors from Chase’s boat,

picked up by the English frigate *Indian*; and that week also, the three seamen who had chosen to remain on the island stepped ashore from another whaler which had sighted their distress signals. But, for all that, only eight men were left from the crew of thirty who had taken the *Essex* out.

The story might well have ended at that point; but a year later the New Bedford whaler *Rebecca Sims* was attacked, rammed, and almost sunk by a vast sperm monster in whose giant head were found two of the harpoons belonging to the *Essex*! Her skipper told Pollard: "The beast was in pretty poor fettle when it came at my ship, Cap'n, but it was still capable of giving the lot of us hell. In the end we killed it, and it gave us around seventy-five barrels of good oil."

So these many hundreds of years ago in the history of the Seven Seas, the whalemén from Nantucket, Long Island, Cape Cod, and Plymouth pioneered the bold, adventurous trade, laid the foundations of modern whaling, faced death with a grim smile, grinned in its face. They lived to tell their epic tales, or died . . . and were forgotten by all but their nearest and dearest.

### 3.

## *Mystery of the Mogul's Throne*

NEWSPAPERS in June, 1950, reported that a seventy-three-year-old salvage engineer, Frederick Duckham, of Kent, was rounding off plans to make a "smash-and-grab" raid on a wreck lying under ten feet of sand and twenty-eight feet of water near the treacherous Lambasi rocks, off the coast of South Africa. At that time it was suggested that a successful attempt would mean the recovery of treasure worth £2,000,000, or \$5,800,000.

It was said that, according to her papers, the ship had been carrying a cargo of silk, spices, and copper, but that these were merely a cover for a secret freight of 19 boxes of precious stones, 720 gold bars, and 1,450 silver ingots. Duckham failed.

Fourteen months later, in August, 1951, the press carried a fresh report, this time to the effect that another new treasure hunt was on; that another attempt was to be made to recover the treasure off the Pondoland coast. But now the cargo was said to be worth £6,500,000, nearly \$19,000,000. Nothing came of that, either; nor were other salvage attempts ever successful. And so far as

newspaper readers abroad were concerned, it was all just another of those salvage pipe-dream romances that bored journalists from time to time feed into the columns of their newspapers while hoping for the best. But nobody knew, or if they knew bothered to tell, the story behind the wrecking of this fine sailing ship; a story maybe without parallel in the history of merchant shipping, certainly without equal in the history of South Africa.

By mule train and carrier, loaded with crates and cases, into Bombay came a caravan; and into Number 1 hold of the East Indiaman *Grosvenor*, under cover of darkness, went nineteen cases of treasure. Diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds; nearly fifteen hundred silver ingots and gold bars worth, at current value in the year 1782, at least £3,000,000. Skillfully the cargo was stowed beneath normal freight of silks and rare spices, and the crew called it a day, glad to get to their bunks, for the ship was scheduled to sail at dawn. Shortly after midnight, however, another smaller caravan reached the dockside, and the deck watch was mustered to haul aboard a bulky crate covered in multiple wrappings.

Under the supervision of Captain Coxon, gold-laced, blue-uniformed, ranking as Post Captain, Royal Navy, the men eased the crate aboard, manhandled it to Number 2 hold, lowered it carefully, and were dismissed back to their watch. Coxon and his chief officer remained in the hold until the last seaman had left, and examined this last piece of cargo entrusted to them to carry safely to the London River.

The crate was pried open, the wrappings removed to disclose to the astonished captain a throne; a throne six feet in height, four feet wide, fashioned entirely of hand-

beaten gold, encrusted and studded with the rarest gems. That throne, the Great Peacock Throne of the Moguls, was reputed to be worth at least £10,000,000.

So at dawn, her fabulous cargo safely under hatches, her passengers all aboard and sleeping, the East Indiaman *Grosvenor* pulled out of Bombay, homeward bound. Among her passengers were officers and men of the British Indian Army, their wives and children, some Indian servants, and Colonel James, Indian Army, who was responsible for all of the passengers.

For more than a week the voyage was without incident, in calm weather; but midway across the Indian Ocean seas began piling up under crosswinds, and blinding rainstorms added to the hazards of keeping the tall wind ship on course. At nightfall on that first fierce day, a mile-long graybeard swept in from the south, crashed into the *Grosvenor*, and claimed the first victim when it smashed across the fo'c'sle head and tore the legs from a seaman unable to escape its devastating onslaught. They carried him below, snugged him down in his bunk, and left him in the care of an army medical officer. They set more sail and carried on course, hoping for the best.

Twelve hours later, careering before a violent following wind going her way like some fear-crazed animal, the *Grosvenor* ran into a severe squall, lost her foresail and mizzen topsail, and was pitched almost on her beam ends, held down there with her lee side less than ten feet above water. Main braces, which had been coiled down on her boat skids, were picked up and swept overboard like writhing snakes; above their heads her crew could hear the wind whipping the remnants of the fore and mizzen lower topsails to rags.

Deckhouses became shambles, with gray-green mountains of water distorted in violence smashing at the ship, sweeping across her, wrecking anything in their path. Coxon ordered his crew forward and set them the task of breaching oil bags to break something of the power of the waves that came at them. But the sea was making a plaything of the tall ship, now at the mercy of the water which continually swept over her, pressing her down, holding her there in a steel grip, never easing up for one moment. Out there, ahead in the dim distance, lay Point Caffraria and the treacherous Lambasi rocks.

Colonel James fought his way along the deck, reached Coxon, and asked him what were their chances of survival.

"You want the truth, sir?"

"For the souls in my charge, Captain, please . . ."

"There's little hope, then. Very little, Colonel."

Moments later, panic broke out. Captain Coxon issued arms to his officers, posted them at strategic points, and ordered them: "Shoot, to kill, any man, sailor or not, who looks like losing his reason!" Then, to three able seamen, Coxon shouted: "Break out lifelines and stand by to await my further orders."

He assembled the remainder of his crew and told them he considered their only chance, should the ship ground on the rocks, would be to rig lifelines ashore, bend on a heavier hawser, rig a bosun's chair, and take the opportunity of heaving every soul to safety on dry land as the weather permitted. Coxon asked for volunteers. Three seamen stepped forward.

"You men—it'll be hazardous, but have you guts enough to tie lines to your waists and go overboard? Back



out if you want to, now you know what it is I've asked for."

"We'll go, sir!"

They went, the three of them. And as they disappeared into the foaming crests of two mountainous seas that rolled in after each other, hoisting the ship and sending her crashing into the rocks, someone called: "The Lord have mercy on them!"

They went, those three seamen, snaking the thin lines after them. And two died out there, crushed and pounded to shapeless pulp. But the third man fought his way through, and they watched him struggle painfully onto the rocks and slither up and along them until he was lost to sight. But the line still held, linking ship with shore like a thread of sewing cotton. Somewhere along the deck a woman shrieked. Somewhere else a man raised a feeble cheer. And someone started singing a well-loved hymn—a hymn whose notes rose, swelled to crescendo, and were broken abruptly when Coxon raised his pistol and fired over the heads of four men who, hastily rigging a float, manhandled it overboard, climbed aboard, and yelled terror-stricken defiance at their captain. The float was swept away, engulfed, overwhelmed; the four men died.

As if struck by a giant ax, the *Grosvenor* split apart, the forward part sweeping around in a vortex of mad-dened water to come athwart the stern; and on both sections pitiable groups of men, women, and children awaited the next blow. But, miraculously, the wind sheered and shifted, the seas abated, and the two parts of what had been a fine ship were carried into shoal water and to comparative safety.

Charts, instruments, clothes, everything appeared to be

lost or destroyed. Coxon managed to save one chronometer from his chartroom; then, with his first officer, he broke open the storeroom. It was touch and go whether they could do it, but he mustered half a dozen seamen and set them to work heaving as much as they could from the food store, carrying it to the deck, and landing it by means of a second bosun's chair.

Hundreds of miles separated the survivors from the nearest known white settlement—hundreds of miles of strange territory unknown to anyone save Colonel James, who had lived in South Africa for a brief period before being posted to the Indian Army command. He and Coxon conferred together.

“What can you suggest, Captain?”

“There's only one thing we can do for a start, Colonel James. We'll rig temporary shelter for the women and children ashore, and you can detail some of your men to mount guard over them by night while my crew under their officers salvage all they can in the way of food and other essentials we can get from the storerooms before it's too late.”

So passed three long weeks, and at the end of that period Coxon called together the men and women passengers, explained their position as he saw it, and told them he thought it best to separate and try to reach some township or white settlement.

“If it is agreed by everyone, I shall take charge of one party, while the second group will go in the care of my second officer, Mister Shaw. He's a man every one of you can trust implicitly. He'll do his best to lead you to safety and salvation. In my party will be all the women and children, their nurses and servants, my first officer with his

wife, the third officer, and our surgeon. In Mister Shaw's party will be all the rest of us . . . and you, Colonel James?"

James stepped forward.

"There are five of us, Captain, who feel we might do better going our own way."

Behind him stood four civilian passengers, wealthy merchants on their way home to Britain; they nodded their agreement.

"Very well. We set out shortly after dawn tomorrow. And may the blessings of God rest with us all."

So they parted, the two larger groups and James with his four friends; they bade each other farewell, called "Good luck," and took their separate routes . . . into the Unknown.

More than five weeks sped past; then into the compound of a Dutch farmstead stumbled four men—semi-delirious, half-starved men—to blurt out the story of the loss of their ship, of how the survivors had split up; of how they themselves, breaking adrift from Coxon's party, had gone their own way one night, to reach this Dutch family. They were seamen. Of the remainder of the crew and her passengers they could say nothing; nothing at all.

They were cared for and taken to Cape Town, to tell their story once again and to be assured that an official investigation would be ordered without delay. A relief expedition of one hundred Europeans and three hundred Africans, accompanied by the seamen, set out to reach the scene of the wreck. They were threatened by menacing tribesmen and forced to retreat, but not before they had managed to find and rescue two white women and seven Indian servants held by a local chief. The women

told how they had been attacked and taken by force from Coxon's party, and how the Captain and all male members of their party had "just disappeared," they could not say where. Of the other women and children in the group, they could say no more than that another party had fought with their captors and carried them away inland.

Colonel Gordon, commander of a garrison near Cape Town, was ordered to investigate these reports, and did so, sending word to London that "white women, and there can be no doubt as to the accuracy of my information, are still living, as prisoners, in a hostile community on the borders of Pondoland." But, strangely, nothing was done for a full ten years. Then to London came another report, this time to the effect that "white women, believed to be survivors from the ship *Grosvenor*, their skin only a shade darker than that of normal European women, have been discovered; that they are undoubtedly Christians, and that they live and endeavour to clothe themselves as Europeans."

Nothing could be discovered as to the fate or whereabouts of Captain Coxon or other members of his party, nor of the second party under Second Officer Shaw, nor of Colonel James and his four wealthy civilian friends.

Six more years sped past. Then came Captain Bligh, of *Bounty* renown. A Scots farmer living near the Cape had managed to contact the famous naval commander and advised Bligh that a seaman named O'Brien, one of the four men who had reached the Dutch farmstead seeking employment, had told him the story of the Peacock Throne; of how it had come aboard the *Grosvenor*; of the secrecy surrounding the cargo of gems, silver, and gold. O'Brien explained that, with another member of the crew,

he had seen Coxon open the big crate and inspect the fabulous throne; and that they had talked together, the day the ship left Bombay, of some means by which, given the chance, they could enrich themselves by entering Numbers 1 and 2 holds and seizing some of the gems, the gold, and silver, and getting it ashore when the ship reached the London River.

The story intrigued Captain Bligh so much that he organized a new expedition and set out to seek the wreck, but failed in the attempt.

For two years nothing more was done; then a salvage attempt met with failure, though the expedition actually walked on the rotting timbers of what had once been a stately East Indiaman. Ten years later another attempt was made to solve the problem of the Peacock Throne; it, too, failed. And as the succeeding years came and went, interest ebbed to vanishing point . . .

In August, 1921, a newly-formed salvage company succeeded in driving a tunnel from the foreshore for a distance of one hundred yards, reaching the submerged wreck; but the workings were flooded when severe weather conditions demanded cessation of further operations.

In August, 1951, another salvage company was registered in Cape Town; its publicized object was "to recover the treasure of the ship *Grosvenor* and the Peacock Throne of the Moguls known to have been in this vessel when it sailed from India for London." That attempt also failed.

Two months later, through ten feet of shifting sands and not more than twenty-eight feet of water, salvage experts thrust a giant dam into the seas and with suction

pumps exposed the remainder of the wreck. But, once again, weather conditions deteriorating, the attempt came to an abrupt end.

Two statements, strange statements, have been heard around the coast of Pondoland these last hundred years: first, "Davy Jones always has the last laugh"; second, "This treasure does not lie in the wreck for certain reasons not unconnected with a few survivors who chose to go their own way when Coxon and Shaw set out with their own parties."

And there rests the Mystery of the Mogul's Throne.

## 4.

### *Saga of a Ferry Ship*

JAMES MILLAR FERGUSON walked along the line of dock buildings and stepped briskly out of the lee of the last block. A flurry of flaked snow hit his face; a rising wind, cold venom in its early fury, whipped at his body, penetrated his raincoat, and sent a chill through the uniform beneath.

“’Mornin’, Cap’n Ferguson, sir. Weather ain’t what it could be an’ it’ll likely git worse. Cold, too. Perishin’ cold.”

In the half-light of that bleak February morning, 1953, the muffled figure of the night watchman, a man who had served the Seven Seas in all its moods, moved from the long shadows of his hut to greet Ferguson, who nodded back.

“It isn’t yachting weather exactly, but it might be worse.”

“Come up around midnight, th’ wind did, sir, an’ it’s steadily got cruel, that it has. Come up about th’ time th’ Glasga’ train pulled in, an’ ’er passengers looked fair frozen when they climbed out. But that weren’t nothin’

compared wi' th' others what came on th' Lunnon train just before six. I ain't never seen folk more perished!"

In the near distance thin fingers of flame split the half-darkness and a creaking of machinery indicated the shadowy spindles of the wharfside crane, hoisting cargo into the ship tied up alongside. Below the crane dock workers moved about, their figures illuminated once in a while by the streaking flames above their heads—flames that emerged from the crane's smokestack steadily, only to be snatched away in the chilling bite of the nor'wester piling up its force hour by hour. Captain James Millar Ferguson, tall, dignified, fifty-five years old, and a veteran of "The Run," grinned at the watchman and moved ahead toward his ship.

The Stranraer-Larne service had known him now for nigh on eighteen years, and he knew these ferry ships better than most men around these bleak parts; around The Rhinns and the notorious North Channel between Scotland and Ireland. There had been a couple of breaks in his service with the ferry: first, when they gave him one of the regular vessels, stripped of its peacetime trappings, converted for war service, and sent him out mine-laying; and second, when they gave him command of a troop-landing ship that served off the beaches of Normandy.

A contented man, Ferguson; an amiable man; an assured, competent seaman; one of the most experienced masters "The Run" had ever known. He was the type of man anybody could trust and rely on, up to the hilt—and beyond, if need be.

Now, as he stepped aboard his ship, he noticed a small group of dock workers loading mail bags; heard the crane



heave at them, hoist them into the shadows, swing them, lower them toward the after end of his ship, down toward the open end of the car deck. Ferguson reckoned there would be precious few folk taking their cars across to Ireland in weather like this. Among his passengers maybe there would be a sprinkling of businessmen; some, but not many, women; perhaps a few youngsters making the crossing with their parents.

A thin finger of smoke from the ship's funnel, caught by the rising wind, whipped down toward him, leaving the peculiar stink of all ships about to pull out. Ferguson stepped into his room, pulled off his raincoat, and walked into his chartroom. This was not going to be the most comfortable trip, not by any stretch of imagination, but there had been plenty of tough crossings before now. Plenty. Above him, on its bulkhead, the clock hands pointed to 7:30 A.M. At 7:45 down on the dockside mooring lines were cast off, and the *Princess Victoria*, almost seven years old to the day, pulled out from Stranraer. She was exactly forty-five minutes behind scheduled sailing time.

In the small radio room behind the wheel house, operator David Broadfoot felt the throb of the ship's engines under his feet, settled himself the more comfortably in his chair, stretched out one long arm, and got to work. This trip was just one of those relief duties for Broadfoot; his own ship was the *Princess Margaret*, but "The Run" had known him even longer than it had known Captain Ferguson. Lean, not unlike the skipper in looks and in build, and usually with a smile playing around his mouth, at age fifty-four or so Broadfoot had served in railway ships since 1915. Another good type, Broadfoot; youthful

in every way, precise, methodical, "shipshape and Bristol fashion." His fingers began their work.

He called the radio station at Portpatrick, giving the exact time of sailing, and smiled when Bill Ross, Portpatrick's operator, acknowledged his signal. A good type was Ross; the two of them had talked together on the air more times than Broadfoot could recall.

*Princess Victoria* steamed slowly the length of Loch Ryan, coming abreast of Cairn Ryan, wartime-built port which had witnessed epic scenes until the end of World War II and now had fallen almost into disuse. Within the next thirty minutes the ferry would clear the Loch and head out on her normal course into the North Channel; she would miss the sheltering lee shore and, if this wind still held, stick her nose right into it. Broadfoot half-braced his lean body expectantly. The smile was still playing about his mouth. Just another of these relieving jobs, then back to the *Princess Margaret*. But they all came alike, these duties, to ferry service radio men like David Broadfoot. . . .

Close on fifty tons of cargo and mail were stowed aboard, most of it on trays lashed securely on the car deck. Forward of this open-ended car deck were the sleeping berths, the lounges; above, on the main deck, more lounges, dining saloons, bars. Above those, on the boat deck, were six lifeboats with accommodation for 333 passengers, and thirty rafts capable of carrying 1,440. There were also 12 Board of Trade lifebuoys and 1,566 life jackets. All of it meant safety for the ship's full complement of 1,515 passengers and 51 crew; she was licensed to carry that total number. But, on this bleak crossing, she carried no more than 176 souls, all told. And four

male passengers, drinks at their elbows, were settling down to a game of cards.

*Princess Victoria* steamed abreast of Cairn Royal, where lights winked from Royal Army Service Corps craft moored safely under the lee shore. Watching the ferry ship as she passed, one of the soldiers told his companions: "It isn't my idea of spending a morning—*like this*—doing that trip. Bad enough already, and that ship isn't into the weather yet. But look what she's *started* doing!"

And the *Princess Victoria* had. Down into a gray-green trough her bows plunged deep, upending her stern until her screws screamed protest. Then she sat down with a crash, repeated the process, repeated it again and yet again. Below, in the engine room, men stood watch at her "trouble valve," nursing her machinery, easing her down as the propellers came clear of the seas, giving her just what she wanted as they bit deep into the frothing waste outside. It looked like a tough crossing.

In his radio room, David Broadfoot heard the meteorological office warning; a radio program was broken into, and a BBC announcer was speaking: "Severe gale. Northerly winds, reaching Force 8, with hail and snow, are expected in all sea areas. Northerly gales will be severe in Faroes, Fair Isle, Hebrides, Malin, Rockall, Bailey . . ."

Outside, as *Princess Victoria* headed into the North Channel, two miles off shore the seas were beyond belief, roaring, racing at the ferry ship, washing over her, seizing her, pitching her over, holding her down, letting her go again. From her wheelhouse the officer on watch took a quick look to check that nothing was unsecured on deck. Ferguson had just given orders that rope lifelines be rigged

across all open parts of the decks, and seamen were busy; below the main deck, stewards cleared tables, fixed the fiddleys, took a hasty look around to make certain everything was as it should be at a time like this, then went away to tend passengers already gripped with nausea.

The hands of the chartroom clock stood at nine. *Princess Victoria* had been afloat for ninety minutes, sixty of those ninety verging on nightmare. And the world was fast going mad.

By now, Captain Ferguson normally would bring his ship around to clear the tip of Loch Ryan, at Corsewall Point, then strike a course sou'westerly for Larne; but with the weather threatening and swiftly becoming more severe, he stood well out from his lee shore, deciding to hold her there a few miles, then change course, coming round so that the wind would be to starboard, on his bow. That was the only wise thing any man could do in these conditions; and, in any event, the *Princess Victoria*, across the North Channel safely, would make another lee shore off the coast of Ireland. A man of Ferguson's hard experience could have taken no other course; but men like Ferguson, even with his years-old knowledge of "The Run," could not be expected to reckon with seas which went berserk—seas which, contrary to everything laid down in books of navigation, sometimes ceased to run as nature intended and, instead, piled themselves up, haphazardly, *and came at the ship from all directions all at once.*

Corsewall Point Light was visible now, though blanketed every few moments by driving snow; Ferguson saw it. Then, under him, his ship took a heavy roll; then another; then a third. In a second, she appeared to regain herself, steaming forward a few hundred yards . . . and

reared clean on end. Nature had taken her wickedest short jab and was about to follow it up without any more notice.

From her main deck a seaman came running, to report to Captain Ferguson that one giant sea, a mass of weltering, maddened water, a tremendous weight of it, had surged up *and through* the heavy, bolted, barred stern gates to the car deck and was sweeping around the cargo stowed there. Ferguson turned to two of his officers, his face grim.

"Get down there, please, as fast as you can go. Take what men you need and get those stern gates closed. I'll ease her down a bit while you're at work. Then get back and let me know the exact position."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Down to her engine room went the signal "Half ahead," and almost imperceptibly the *Princess Victoria* lost way. Ferguson realized, and dreaded the knowledge, that if following seas were running behind his ship they would sweep freely and without pause into the car deck aft. With that realization, and without waiting the report from his two officers, he ordered a change of course immediately; a course which would take the vessel back toward the lee of Loch Ryan. A moment later he made a fresh decision. If he put her bows clear *into* the seas—into those menacing, following seas—with luck he could take her into the Loch *stern first*. That meant using her bow rudder. He called for "Chips."

"Take two men," ordered Ferguson, "get up forrard, unshackle the bow rudder. Quick as you can make it, but take care. It'll be tricky for the three of you."

The carpenter had taken less than three strides toward

his mission before the two officers returned from the car deck. Their faces were gray.

"That sea," one of them reported, "sprung the locking bolts to the stern gates, took hold of the steel stays, twisted the door edges. We tried using crowbars to straighten the doors, but we can't. Nobody could. There's three feet of water washing around down there, and more coming in every minute."

"Cancel that order I gave the carpenter," Ferguson told them. "If that's the way it is, it's too risky for them to try unshackling that bow rudder. Ask Broadfoot to send this message."

At his dials at Portpatrick Post Office Radio Station, moments later, Bill Ross got the Morse signal: "XXX *Princess Victoria* to GPK hove to off mouth Loch Ryan vessel not under command urgent assistance of tug required."

Ross turned to his assistant.

"The ferry's in trouble. Get this call into the teleprinter and phone it at once to Station Officer McGarrie."

Ashore, telephones buzzed into action. McGarrie, duty coast guard on watch, contacted District Officer Charles Spreadborough, former chief Royal Navy yeoman of signals. Spreadborough called Corsewall Point Light and asked whether they could see the *Princess Victoria*. No, they told him; nobody there could see anything, with visibility down to zero and seas like those running. So Spreadborough next phoned Cairn Ryan, but nobody there had any news for him of the stricken ferry. He alerted Portpatrick lifeboat.

Forty-five minutes passed—forty-five minutes of sheer agony for every man, ashore and afloat, directly con-

cerned. And then came another call from the *Princess Victoria*; neat, precise, in perfect Broadfoot style.

"SOS SOS SOS four miles northwest Corsewall car deck flooded with heavy list to starboard require immediate assistance ship not under command."

Bill Ross took that call and acted. He flashed his message to all ships in the vicinity, to all coast guard stations, to Lloyd's, to the Royal Navy officer commanding the area. Back came a signal from the naval submarine depot ship lying in Rothesay Bay. It was brief: "*Destroyer Contest* is coming to the aid of *Princess Victoria* should reach her at approximately 14:00 hours."

Captain Ferguson was faced with a number of alternatives. He could continue steaming into the north—but if he did that, the *Princess Victoria* in her crippled state would head into heavier weather, heavier seas. He could heave to—but, with her light draught and high decking, the ship might not stand it. He could try returning to the Loch stern first—but, with no bow rudder, that might be suicidal. Finally, running downwind toward the comparative safety of Loch Ryan, he would expose those open stern doors to the full weight of the mounting sea furies.

It was a desperate state for any man to be in. He paused a moment, then made his final decision. He would dice with death. He would take what appeared to be the only chance remaining. He would nurse his ship, bring her slowly round to port, head for the coast of Ireland. Every single yard she could make toward that coast, less than thirty miles distant, would give her a better chance of existing. A few hours, and she would run under that shelter. Just a few brief hours . . . three, four, maybe five at the most.

He switched on his intercommunication system and spoke slowly, choosing his words carefully.

"Your attention, everybody. The Captain asks you to be prepared for a spell of heavy rolling. The ship is undergoing a most severe test, but as yet there is no danger. You will be safe."

He gave the helmsman a fresh course, so that the seas might come in at her starboard bow. The helm swung. *Princess Victoria* rolled, over and back again, over and back; then she reeled like a boxer dazed in the ring. Ferguson feared the worst, now.

He ordered stewards to rouse and gather together passengers and get them assembled in the first-class saloon, where they were to be issued life jackets and shown how to wear them in safety. Then he switched on the intercom once more.

"Attention, everybody, please. The ship is undergoing a spell of very grave emergency. Lifebelts are being issued to you all for your safety. Before fixing them in position, will you all please put on what warm clothing you have at your disposal."

There was no sign of panic. Passengers and crew had their trust, their faith, in the man called James Millar Ferguson . . .

But down in the engine room, water had crept in and was piling itself up, sloshing from port to starboard and back as the ship rolled. Her auxiliary pumps were working flat out, kicking the watery menace back whence it came. But it still rose steadily.

At exactly three minutes to noon, David Broadfoot transmitted his next signal, this time to the destroyer: "*Princess Victoria* to *Contest* thirty-five degrees list to



starboard approximately two hundred tons water now in car deck have started radar trying to get bearing." Forty-five minutes passed. Then: "Radar of no use too much list on ship sorry."

In Belfast Lough, aboard the coastal freighter *Orchy*, Hugh Angus Matheson, master, relieving her regular captain, switched on the radio for the weather forecast put out by all British Broadcasting Corporation stations before the one o'clock news bulletin. What he heard was by no means reassuring. Then, at the stroke of the hour, a news reader's voice came on the air. And the first item of news contained the name *Princess Victoria*. Matheson reckoned she would be nigh on twenty-five to twenty-eight miles away from where his own ship lay sheltering.

Portpatrick came in, loud and clear, repeating the distress signals of the ferry ship. In his vicinity, Matheson knew, were the freighter *Lairdsmoor* and the oil tanker *Pass of Drumochter*. He called them. He suggested they steam, line abreast, into the northward, toward the crippled *Princess Victoria*. And so they went, that gallant little armada, half awash, pitching into a gray-green hell. Nearly one thousand cattle, tethered in the holds of the *Lairdsmoor*, took a protesting part in this courageous attempt to succor human beings somewhere out there.

The BBC news bulletin ended. And then from *Princess Victoria* came another call: "Am stopped lying on beam end." Seven minutes later: "Am abandoning ship." Then silence—until, at 1:47 P.M. *Princess Victoria* came on the air again: "*Princess Victoria* to Portpatrick Radio Captain Ferguson can see lighthouse off entrance to Belfast Lough."

Bill Ross called back: "Can you get a bearing, old

man?" And Broadfoot replied: "Sorry, can't for squall."

At two minutes before two o'clock, David Broadfoot made his signal, giving an approximate position. It was the last signal he made.

H.M.S. *Contest*, the freighters *Orchy* and *Lairds-moor*, the tanker *Pass of Drumochter*, the Portpatrick lifeboat *Jeannie Speirs*, and the Donaghadee lifeboat *Sir Samuel Kelly*, were on their way to lend a hand. And on the bridge of *Princess Victoria*, James Millar Ferguson, Master-under-God, waited in silence for the tug which was never to reach him. The destroyer was first to reach the tragic scene, closely followed by the Donaghadee lifeboat. Away in the distance came the *Orchy*, *Lairds-moor*, *Pass of Drumochter*. But the *Princess Victoria* had gone. Gone forever from the sight of man, five long miles away, to the northward; gone to her end.

Out of the welter of foaming water came lifeboats, broken wood, flotsam—and bodies. Aboard the *Orchy*, Captain Matheson called Portpatrick Radio Station: "Have seen wreckage oil life jackets people on rafts." Then, to all the other rescue ships near him, Matheson sent out a call: "Please close in on me I am among people afloat and bodies I cannot lower my boats because of the seas but am doing my best. Can any of you see me? Please come to me. All ships in this vicinity please come to me."

At twenty minutes before six o'clock, at the close of that bleak day of February, 1953, Matheson called Portpatrick Radio. He told them: "I can do nothing more there is no further sign of life here."

Out of those raging seas, out of the shrieking winds, out of the snow squalls, the rescue ships snatched 43 survivors from the *Princess Victoria's* 176 passengers and

crew who had sailed that morning out of Stranraer. Ice-cold courage and gallantry had helped play out the bitter tragedy to the fearful climax. Now it was all over—ended. And there were no women among those forty-three who lived to tell the tale of living nightmare, the saga of a ferry ship called *Princess Victoria*.

## 5.

### *The Teaser at Tobermory*

DURING those humid ten days which intervened between July 19 and July 29, 1588, the fate of England hung in precarious balance. A battle was near; a fight that would secure future freedom of movement on the high seas.

Two great empires, one of the past, the other with a bright future, confronted each other in the normally quiet, peaceful waters of the English Channel. And English seamen were of the opinion that the rich fruit of Spain's imperialism hung overripe in the red sunset; that the least adverse breeze might conceivably bring it down, once and for all time. That breeze was to blow on that epic morning in 1588. And Elizabeth I had her own personal ideas which way the wind was to go.

Like Hitler after the fall of Dunkirk, so did Philip of Spain have many and varied, and urgent, reasons for attempting an invasion of that insignificant island, England. His battle cry was that his great Armada would come as a religious crusade; his private opinion was that the invasion was necessary by virtue of the fact that he was husband of Bloody Mary, Elizabeth's predecessor.

He sensed that England was perhaps suffering growing pains of adversity, for much the same had happened in his own country in the past; moreover, English seamen had ventured more than once in exploits which he regarded with high disfavor. England was, in fact, taking shape as a considerable competitor on the ocean trade routes.

The balance of power was precarious, a pretty problem. One nation was involved in continental entanglements with rebellious provinces and with a semihostile France; the other was seeking by every means to delay the day of final reckoning. That day, the day on which the question of sea supremacy between Spain and England was due for decision, dawned in May, 1588, when the vast Spanish fleet set sail from Lisbon with instructions to encompass the total destruction of England's seamen and so remove forever any threats against the future of Spain at sea.

As always, something of an eleventh-hour ally came to the aid of the Englishmen; a violent storm forced the invading ships to run for shelter into Coruña and the invasion was delayed. Two months later the Armada again set sail, 138 great ships carrying nearly thirty thousand fully armed fighting men.

England faced a battle of the seaways; England would win, or fall, out there at sea. Drake knew it, none better. And Drake knew also that this Armada was the spearhead of the enemy attack. If he failed to stop it and thrash it—if any of the Spanish ships made landfall and created a bridgehead—a second and perhaps more formidable force, under the veteran fighter-strategist Parma, awaited on the continental shore of Europe for word of the coming

battle that would be fought without mercy under England's white cliffs.

Howard of Effingham, commander of the Royal Navy, mustered from harbors and out-of-the-way creeks around the English coast every conceivable available ship; he was joined by thirty-four armed merchantmen under Drake.

There was indeed little that might be called spectacular about that battle. There were skirmishes and feints, retreats and advances; a picture at once typical of the character of English seamen who knew in their hearts that they would win, in spite of the fact that they faced at sea the full might of a nation highly organized for war, while the sea power of their own country was something completely incoherent, mainly dependent on the initiative of the sailorman rather than on the state. For this was a battle for sea freedom between a country whose merchant carrying trade was designed and operated by government, and an adversary who depended on the individual enterprise and daring of her sea-going menfolk.

Thus it was fought; and on Friday, July 29, 1588, the struggle was decided. Fireships sent among the Spanish galleons spread panic and wrought terrible destruction, and now the surviving vessels were running for their lives into the North Sea, and, later, were to suffer still more tribulations during a severe storm off the coast of Ireland.

And as the remnants of the enemy force crept back miserably to Lisbon, seamen of England bathed their wounds, tended their damaged ships, and looked to the future. England's fate had hung in the balance, but the scales had been tipped by her ships and the men who served in them.

Dozens of legends were to spring up concerning those Spanish galleons which ran for safety. The most popular, and generally accepted, was that of "a greate shippe of Spain, beaten with shot and weather, which sought sanctuary in Tobermory on September 13, 1588."

It relates how the Spanish captain, whose food store was meager, went ashore and demanded supplies from the Scots crofters and fisherfolk, but met instant opposition from the local chieftain, The McLean, who replied that he might consider giving some assistance if the Spaniard, for his part, would aid him with men to raid the McLean enemies who lived on the nearby islands of Canna, Rum, Eigg, Tiree, and elsewhere. The galleon's commander considered the proposal, then agreed; one hundred men from his ship were landed and put under the command of The McLean.

But when the time came for the galleon to continue on her course homeward, those hundred troops were missing, foraging far afield on their own account; and so the galleon's captain visited The McLean once more and insisted that supplies be brought aboard without further delay. Meanwhile, he intended sending a search party ashore to seek out the missing hundred.

Hesitating, The McLean agreed, but decided to send his son Donald Glas McLean with the stores aboard the galleon, to deliver them safely and to see that "no tricks may be done." The youngster reached the big ship lying in the bay, saw the stores loaded aboard, followed them, and was promptly clapped in leg irons, hustled below deck, made prisoner in a dark apartment next to the galleon's powder magazine. The legend ends on a heroic

tailpiece. Donald contrived to set light to the next compartment and blew the ship, her crew, and himself "to kingdom come in Tippermorie in the Sound of Mull."

A pretty story, had it ended there; but it did not. Instead, rumor reared what later proved to be an ugly head. It was hinted, and very darkly, that the galleon was in fact none other than the 961-ton *La Florentia*, sometimes known as the *Duque de Florencia*, and that on board had been the naval paymaster of Spain—with no less than thirty million pieces of eight. Almost at once, the rumor was scotched by a report, submitted to the Queen by Drake himself, that in fact the Spanish paymaster general, with his entire staff and his ship, had been taken in prize and brought safely into Weymouth Bay, on the Dorset coast. For a while, the matter rested.

Some few years later, however, pieces of gold plate, bearing the arms of the Pereira family of Spain, were recovered from the bed of Tobermory Bay. And at once rumor took a fresh lease on life. More so, indeed, when it became known that the commander of the lost galleon was in fact Pereira, one of the wealthiest men of Philip's reign. Surely therefore, claimed the optimists, this wreck *must* be a treasure ship!

For three centuries thereafter, kings, queens, dukes, and men of less renown were to seek this treasure, the coveted gold and silver reputed to lie beneath the waters of Tobermory; and it may be significant that two Dukes of Argyll, who claimed rights in the sunken galleon, lost their heads for their beliefs and their pains. In one case, the warrant for execution was signed by the King after the Duke had been beheaded. But nobody secured any treasure, then or since.



Colonel K. M. Foss held the treasure lease for a considerable period, and his investigations took him back through the dim pages of history. He searched state documents in London; he went carefully through official archives in Paris; he visited the Spanish castle of Simancas and the National Archives in Venice—and could prove nothing. Some months later, however, he produced an old Spanish silver spoon, an encrusted sword, and a few Spanish coins salvaged from the bay; but these items also proved nothing when it came to the real identity of the sunken ship.

There were rumors also that the wrecking of the so-called “treasure ship” was in fact actually plotted in London, at the court of Queen Elizabeth. And when Charles I visited Holyrood to open the Scottish Parliament, the eighth Duke of Argyll, who appeared to know far more of the story than did the King, requested from Charles salvage rights in the wreck.

An agreement was drawn up whereby the King should receive a percentage of any treasure salvaged, and a royal commission formally acknowledged this undertaking. But Charles II claimed that the salvage rights existed only during the time of Charles I; a lawsuit followed and went in favor of the Duke of Argyll. Almost immediately afterward, when Argyll visited London to pay his respects to the King, he was arrested, charged with plotting the execution of Charles I, tried, found guilty, and beheaded without the chance of appeal. Three weeks *after* he died on the scaffold, Charles II consented to sign the death warrant.

James II visited Tobermory and argued that the Argyll rights had lapsed; but the Lords Sessions in Edinburgh

upheld the rights of the Duke and left the Argyll family free to continue seeking the treasure—if it had ever existed.

In 1677, the Duke of Argyll entered into an arrangement with a Scandinavian salvage expert, whereby the latter should receive £3,000 from the first haul of treasure recovered and 50 per cent of the value of all jewels, gold, and silver recovered thereafter. A second lawsuit with the Crown ensued, and during the hearing the Duke himself gave evidence that “the value of the treasure is thirty million of money.”

Diving apparatus arrived at Tobermory from Sweden. And then, unexpectedly, the Clan McLean disputed the Argyll claim and contested the foreshore rights. In the subsequent lawsuit Argyll won the day. But a year later he was arrested, charged with treason, and sentenced to death by the King, but managed to escape to Holland. He returned to England and was again arrested, and James II personally ordered that sentence of death be carried out without further delay. So died another Duke of Argyll, defying the executioner to the last, on June 30, 1685.

And immediately James II sent word throughout Britain and overseas requiring that any man experienced in salvage and diving should report himself to the court without delay “to work on the Tobermory galleon.” James offered as reward half the value of all such treasure safely recovered.

The Tobermory wreck remained a tantalizing problem, luring men on to seek what was believed to be fabulous wealth. The year was 1688; the tenth Duke of Argyll had returned to England from Europe and had been granted his dukedom with all rights in his family’s lands and titles

fully restored; and restoration included full liberty to salvage the galleon and whatever it contained within its rotting timbers.

The prospects appeared to hold promise, and work was started again. Confined within a primitive type of diving bell, a salvage expert had already located the exact position of the galleon. In a subsequent report, sworn before an attorney, he claimed to have inspected one part of the wreck, the forepeak, to which he said much damage had been done, apparently by explosion. Thus the testimony of diver Archibald Miller, whose opinion it was that "any money aboard must lay in position immediately under the powder magazine."

A solid silver ship's bell was salvaged by Miller, together with part of an engraved bronze cannon. He stated: "I believe her name to be *Florence*, of Spain." But Miller was not certain of this fact.

Sir Robert Davis, head of Siebe Gorman and Company, Limited, world-famous submarine and safety-device engineers, and author of *Deep Diving and Submarine Operations*, wrote thus of Miller's activities at the bed of Tobermory Bay:

The history, and even the identity of this unfortunate ship, a straggler from the rout of the Spanish Armada, is involved in myth and confusion. She is popularly supposed to have been a treasure ship, named *Florentia*, and many credulous persons have been led to find funds for successive and abortive salvage operations. It was thought that she carried gold and jewels and Spanish doubloons to the value of two million pounds.

The story goes that, during a foray ashore, the Spaniards captured a Highland chieftain, Donald M'Lean, who, de-

terminated on revenge at whatever cost, made secret entry to the ship's magazine, and, firing the powder, blew himself and five hundred Spaniards to eternity. *But the Florentia carried no treasure, and is known to have got back to Lisbon.*

The ship sunk in the bed of Tobermory Bay has been shown, by the late Andrew Lang and Mr. R. P. Hardie, to have been the *San Juan Bautista*, of Sicily. Some say that she likewise carried no treasure; others are equally confident that she carried great wealth.

It should be remembered that the Spaniards reported at the time that the *Florentia* was one of the few ships, assisted by the subsequent storm which destroyed many of the runaways, to get back home after the trouncing which Admiral Drake gave them, though, for a long time, there were many people who thought—indeed, even today, there are people who think—that this might have been said in order to minimise the disaster for military and political reasons. Similar deceptions have been practised in warfare in quite recent times.

A diving-bell was used in 1665 for the purpose of examining the vessel; and one Archibald Miller, of Greenock, worked on the wreck at some date between 1680 and 1683. The following extract from a deposition made by Miller more than 250 years ago is interesting:

“ . . the shippe lyes sunck off the shore, about one-fingerstone east, her sterne lyes into the shore norwest, and her head to the southwest; she lyes under ye water at ye deepest nine fatham at a low water and twelve fatham at a full sea on high water. There is no deck upon her except in ye hinder part.

“In the forepart of ye shippe lyes many great ballast stones and some shot among them, and there I found 1 silver bell about 4 li [pounds weight]; I got within ye

shippe at a pretty distance the said gun with other two, all brass, the great gun is eleaven feet length and seaven inches and one fourth part of measure in ye bore; the other two were minions [4-pounders]; I also got two demy culverins [ $2\frac{1}{2}$ -pounders], two slings, all brass. We lifted three anchors whereof one was eighteen feet of length, the other was fifteen and the third was ten.

"I lifted the kemp stone [capstan] of curious work, pauled with a spring every inches-end; I cannot tell ye bigness, the thing I found would have been about two feet in the diamiter. I saw something like a coat of armes, but could not reach it, being entangled. Witness my hand at Grinock, this Twentieth day of November, 1683.—Archibald Miller."

For nearly two centuries after Miller's activities, and for reasons which were never apparent, nothing more was done; then, in the late 1880's, the Duke of Argyll, Marquess of Lorne, who later married Princess Louise, decided to recommence salvage operations. He engaged the services of a diver, Thomas Gush, who in a diving suit of that period descended to the bed of the bay and returned to report that "the galleon has now completely disappeared, probably under silt and sand." Not one trace of the wreck was visible, and Gush was nearly drowned during his inspection; hopes of salvage that year were abandoned.

Next came Colonel Foss, who obtained a lease of salvage from the Duke of Argyll; in 1912 it was discovered that the wreck lay under thirty feet of silted clay, eighty-four yards from Tobermory Pier, at a depth of forty-eight feet at low tide. But though they worked feverishly from 1912 to 1914, and for one season in 1919, only a

couple of pewter plates, one or two Spanish dollars, a few cannon balls, and some miscellaneous items were brought to the surface. Colonel Foss nearly lost his life when high-pressure hoses, throwing great jets of water at terrific force, were accidentally turned on him, smashing his ribs and inflicting severe internal injuries. As reward for all this, not more than £1,000 worth of "treasure" came into the possession of the gallant but unfortunate colonel. He gave it up and never returned to Tobermory.

Then came more rumor; it was suggested that the treasure had in fact been recovered secretly; indeed, it was hinted that "certain folk round about" had suddenly "acquired remarkable evidence of wealth." But only the silent bay could supply any answer to these veiled suggestions.

On March 2, 1950, the Admiralty entered into a contract with the Duke of Argyll to undertake, on a repayment basis, some diving operations in Tobermory Bay, in the Island of Mull, in an attempt to locate a wrecked Spanish galleon alleged to have been lying there submerged. That is the official Admiralty wording of the contract.

Two small craft, ML 2592 and MFV 1037, sailed from Port Elgar on March 1 to begin the operations, under the command of Lieutenant-Commander R. Parkinson, D.S.C., R.N.

It was expected that the operation "may last several weeks"; and the Admiralty emphasized, "It should be made clear that the Royal Navy is concerned only in the location of the wrecked galleon and not in any subsequent salvage operations."

And so the King's ships were setting out, seeking to make contact, across the centuries, with—what? The Spanish Armada treasure ship *La Florentia*? The Sicilian troopship *San Juan Bautista*, loaned to Philip of Spain at the time of the Armada? Or a galleon named *Florida* which, defeated and weather-beaten, drifted to her death in the waters of Tobermory?

Naval divers and frogmen, using powerful pumps to blow compressed air to the bed of the bay in an effort to clear the silted sand, with electronic detectors to locate the wreck, on March 22, 1950, were rewarded by the sight of a dagger sheath and a blade. But no more. Twenty-nine-year-old Leading Seaman Stephen Keeling, native of Liverpool, was credited with this find. Nine days of further activity passed, and then Lieutenant-Commander Parkinson said: "We have found a fairly large quantity of timber, which appears to be . . . the wreck of a very old ship."

Heavy-duty suction gear for further operations reached Tobermory on April 12, and Parkinson said: "This equipment should do the job properly." On April 20, divers and frogmen were excavating the bed of the bay to a depth of six feet; they broke all records by working more than twenty diving hours nonstop. But nothing more was recovered. The season was slipping swiftly past, yet still the forty-six-year-old Duke of Argyll felt optimistic.

Success, and a complete reversal of known facts acknowledged by a small band of skeptics, would produce fabulous wealth, running into millions. Failure would mean an empty end to this eleventh attempt to produce a king's ransom in gold—perhaps, too, the wealth that had

been offered by Philip of Spain to the Duke of Alba as inducement for the successful invasion of England more than 350 years ago.

But they discovered nothing more than a dagger sheath; and those skeptics recalled, in 1950, what Sir Julian Corbett, naval historian, had written in 1912, when Colonel Foss was active in the famous bay. Corbett claimed that a galleon named *Florentia*, hired by Spain from Italy, had indeed taken part with the ill-fated Armada, but that utter and complete confusion was caused because two galleons were commanded by captains bearing the same surname; moreover, Corbett pointed out that a vessel the size of *La Florentia*, of 961 tons, could hardly have carried her full armament, five hundred soldiers, and thirty million Spanish pieces of eight weighing more than 750 tons.

Early in 1955 the Duke of Argyll arranged yet another contract with the Admiralty; it was suggested that this would be the final attempt to recover the treasure. One of Britain's leading salvage experts, Captain J. B. Pollard, who had assisted in recovery of the wreck of the Comet airliner off Elba in 1954, was called in to advise.

Echo sounders were mustered at Tobermory and revealed a hundred-foot-long mound at the bottom of the bay; beneath that mound, believed the Duke, lay the remains of the "treasure" ship. A Royal Navy depot ship, a giant sand sucker and a dredger, with a supply vessel and a gallant little company of twelve Navy frogmen were ready, as soon as the weather permitted. They said: "It will take a few weeks only, maybe, or it might be as long as three months." The point was, once and for all time, the "mystery" of Tobermory *would* be solved before the summer season ended. In June, 1955, one of Brit-



ain's ace wartime frogmen, forty-four-year-old Lieutenant-Commander Lionel Kenneth Crabb, was granted two months' special leave by the Admiralty "to take charge of a further expedition at Tobermory." This latest attempt, everyone said, "will be the most ambitious of all." The Navy men were equipped with underwater television cameras and, once again, those trusty old "powerful suction pumps."

Crabb reached Tobermory and checked in at a nearby hotel; meanwhile Mrs. Betty Luxmore, aboard the treasure-seeking vessel *Ardchattan*, tied up at Greenock, took on the duties of ship's cook, and found she could not beg, buy, or borrow fresh milk for the crew's first meal. Someone said it was "a very bad start." Perhaps it was.

They drove a two-foot-wide shaft through that silt; they claimed that the galleon lay about eighteen feet from that shaft. Crabb climbed into his frogman's outfit and was first to descend. Ashore, the Duchess of Argyll, with her favorite dog, watched; and Berkshire-born, square-jawed, weather-tanned, retired Rear Admiral Patrick Vivian McLaughlin, in command of the expedition, looked on too, and pondered, no doubt over the host of ideas enthusiasts had sent to him. One of them was: "Why not build a wall right across the entrance to the bay, *and pump it dry!*"

And as three red marker buoys weaved around in those eddies and swirls of the bay, aboard another armada—of pleasure ships this time—crowds of excited or bored holiday makers, sucking ice creams, paid good money "to see the treasure hunt." Under the lowering gray skies, as the seas started running higher with a westerly wind to sweep them in and across the waters that so effectively covered

that mystery mound, ashore, up in his centuries-old home, the Duke of Argyll admitted that this latest, and very, *very* last, hunt “may produce more fun than money.” And so it did, for the Duke’s divers brought up nothing.

Time after time, down the years, the treasure seekers have worked and toiled at high pressure throughout a season, only to fail through lack of equipment or capital, or some other reason. Again and again, they have buoyed and otherwise marked the exact location of the wreck. And again failed to produce anything that even smacked of fabulous amounts of Spanish doubloons, pieces of eight, gold, silver, or, as was once suggested, a “heavily jewelled crown sent in *Florenzia* by the Pope for Philip to wear once he landed on English soil.”

The vital question remains: did *any* treasure *ever* exist in this ship whose bones lie rotting in the famous bay? The writer, for one, submits that the question would appear to be quite unanswerable.

## 6.

### *Mystery of the Madagascar*

CAPTAIN FORTESCUE HARRIS, bluff, bearded, broad-shouldered, Master-under-God of the seventeen-year-old, three-masted, 835-ton windjammer *Madagascar*, was a worried man; for he wanted a crew, but alongshore at Port Philip Roads and for miles inland nothing stirred. Nothing, that is, but insect life.

Eighteen months had sped past since the world heard the first news that alluvial gold had been rocked out from the broad acres of Australia, and the discovery was still regarded by geologists with some suspicion. They protested, in fact, that gold in Australia just could not exist; if it did, then all their theories in geology were wrong. And geologists hate being proved wrong. But the government issued licenses to stake-claimers, and fever swept the land; farmers forsook plows, growers their rich grapevines. Then went the townsmen, a trickle at first, quickly swelled by doctors, lawyers, businessmen, customs officials, finally most of the nondescript police force. And, adding to their numbers, the crews of every vessel reaching Port Philip; all of them willing and prepared to gang up as a hard-living, hard-fighting team, pledged to stop

at nothing as they tore the vitals out of every square yard of land to lay hands on the precious metal.

Upward of five thousand Americans were there, digging alongside fifteen hundred Frenchmen, twenty-five thousand Chinese, around one hundred thousand English, sixty-odd thousand Scots, as many Irishmen, four thousand men from faraway Wales, and some ten thousand Germans. Outside deserted homesteads householders had chalked: "Gone to the diggings." Most stores were empty, and in the very few that remained open prices had soared; a comb cost around six dollars, a candle three to four, a small tin of sardines as much as one hundred. Only human life was cheap. And Captain Harris wanted a crew to work this fine wind ship back to Europe, thence to New York, with her full complement of passengers and, of more importance, 68,350 ounces of gold dust stowed away in her strong room.

So she lay there, moored alongside, while Harris tramped ashore seeking likely men, and returned, unsuccessfully, to his ship as another big windjammer dropped anchor. Harris knew her well, for this new arrival was the East Indiaman *Roxburgh Castle*, newly out from the London River; a thousand-tonner, this tall ship, commanded by Captain Dinsdale.

To Dinsdale, Harris told his story of mass desertion, warning that the *Roxburgh Castle* would lose her men, too. With the pilot, the two commanders stepped into the cabin for a drink.

"You got a Mrs. de Carteret and her three children aboard, Cap'n?"

"That's so, Pilot. Why?"

"Her husband was killed at the diggings. Does she know?"

Dinsdale frowned. "She came out in my ship from London to join her husband, Pilot. Heaven knows what this might mean to her, poor soul." He summoned his steward, asked him to request Mrs. de Carteret to come to the cabin, and there broke the news to her. He suggested: "You'll not wish to go ashore, ma'am? Not after this news?"

"I can't. It would be dreadful for the children to know their father is dead. But what can I do? I don't wish to remain here. Can you help me in any way, please?"

"Well, ma'am, there's a trustworthy woman I know of, lost her man too a week or so back, wanting to return to England. She'd help with the three children, and spare you too much worry. Cap'n Harris is pulling out in the *Madagascar* so soon as he gets a crew aboard, so why not take passage with him? I'd get this woman to join you as nurse, so soon as you say the word."

So it was arranged. And toward sundown that day aboard the *Madagascar* stepped not just the widowed woman to act as nurse to Mrs. de Carteret's youngsters, but three purposeful men, Melbourne detectives, with warrants for the arrest of two passengers wanted for the McIvor Gold Escort robbery, the latest act of crime to cause mild excitement in a small world of gold-hungry men dreaming of millionairessdom overnight. Captain Harris was present when the baggage of the suspects was searched and produced evidence of their crime; he watched them manacled and taken ashore. Then, for a full three weeks, while his complaining passengers ate

the ship out of victuals, Harris continued seeking a likely crew. On August 5, 1853, the *Madagascar* hoisted her canvas, caught the wind, stood out from Port Philip Roads, and slowly disappeared from sight. She never saw London River again.

It was quiet and hushed in the little room on the outskirts of Auckland—a sparsely furnished combination room this, with a table, two chairs, a cupboard, a bed—and the curtains had been drawn so that bright sunlight might be shaded from the tired eyes of a woman who lay near the point of death. She was old and very tired, and her eyes were smiling faintly as she looked up at the priest who sat by her side and held the frail fingers of her hands. She wanted to tell him her story, for she had carried it in her mind so many long, wearying years, and now she had to speak.

The *Madagascar*, she faltered, sailed from Port Philip Bay that humid August afternoon of 1853, passed Point Lonsdale and Cape Otway, and set course to westward. She had heard that it was the intention of Captain Harris to call in at Adelaide, stay there a day or two, then pull out on the long voyage homeward, calling maybe at Cape Town for stores and fresh water, thence to London—a distance, all told, of some twelve thousand miles. They all wanted to see home again, and none more eagerly than Mrs. de Carteret and the three children.

For the best part of two weeks the weather was good, and passing ships were sighted and spoken as the big three-master made good running, her sails filling with the winds and driving her on course without incident. Perhaps not *quite* without incident, she said, for Harris had

come upon some members of the crew talking quietly together when they should have been at work, and the men, muttering under their breath, had dispersed and returned to their work with ill grace. A storm in a teacup, the captain had assured his passengers, and nothing much to worry about; it had been difficult scraping together some kind of crew to work the ship home, and this was only to be expected. A sorry lot, he said, and a mighty sad lot of hands who could work a ship when it suited them, but for all that were mainly interested in money and what money would buy them ashore. But there was no reason to worry. This would blow over soon.

The ship reached the Cape, dropped anchor in the bay, took aboard fresh food and replenished her water tanks, then stood out to sea for the six-thousand-mile run to London. Five days later, the weather deteriorating, Captain Harris shortened sail and warned the passengers to keep to their cabins and not venture on deck until conditions improved. Huddled below decks, they could hear the pounding of the seas, the shriek of the wind as it tore savagely at the big windjammer. Then, in a sudden lull, they heard men yelling.

"You'll do what we order, Harris, or it'll be the worse for you and your officers. You'll lower those two boats and pull clear; you'll take nothing with you, food nor drink, and that's clear. Lucky you are we've decided to give you the chance to live."

Below decks, they heard Harris defy the mutinous men, heard him challenge them to do their worst, heard the sound of shooting, then silence. Late that day, under a pale, watery moon, the passengers were mustered on deck and addressed by a spokesman.

"When this ship left Port Philip," he told them, "Harris had nigh on seventy thousand ounces of pure gold in his cabin. Harris thought we didn't know, but we knew all right! We knew, too, that he had been scratching around for a crew, and we wanted to get back to England, some of us to New York. It was a gift. Gold for the taking, no more work than was necessary, and a free passage, see? But Harris and his officers didn't come into our picture, and they had to go; we gave them the chance of getting away in boats and being picked up by passing ships, but they wouldn't accept our offer . . . so . . . you heard the result. They had to be got rid of. We did just that."

He faced the assembled passengers, menaced them with two pistols, and beckoned to his companions, also armed.

"Every man among you passengers'll take orders from me and my men; you'll step down into the main hold, now, and no loitering. With you go the older women. Step lively!" He fired warning shots over their heads, and grinned as his companions herded the men and older women below.

"Batten 'em down!" To five girls who remained, he yelled: "Into that boat, you, and no arguments. Get provisions aboard, you men, and stand by for further orders." For the next half-hour, heading a team of fellow mutineers, he went around the ship forcing open her seams, gathered together everything inflammable, fired it, climbed into one of the lifeboats, and pulled clear. The *Madagascar* would burn down to her waterline, then sink, taking with her all male passengers and the older women; soon there would be no trace of her left. They had done a good job of this . . .



For three days the four boats, jury sails hoisted, drove before a freshening wind, steering a rough course to the northwest; but the South Atlantic can play strange tricks with canvas, and the sails were blown out. They unshipped the long oars, pulled on them until muscles cracked, quit, and lay to for the night. At dawn, the wind moderating, they rigged the sails once more and went on their way; then came sudden realization that stores were running out, that drinking water was down to the bare minimum; then the Atlantic erupted once again and took the boats in a vicious grip, tossing them like straws, overwhelming them one by one.

Two weeks later, six men and five young women stumbled ashore between Cape de São Roque and Caicara, on the northeast coast of Brazil, exhausted and almost at the end of their tether. With no more than a faint spark of life left among them, as they lay on the shore they watched their lifeboat splintered and shattered to matchwood; watched her break up *and take with her to the sea bed a strong leather bag containing the 68,000-odd ounces of gold.*

The little room was very quiet now; the voice of the woman trailed off, her tired eyes closed. Outside, the sun was losing its brilliance and the song of birds died away. It was a full half-hour before she roused and spoke again.

"Suffering, for all of us, the seamen and the women, was severe enough while we were in that frail little lifeboat, but, once we reached land, our plight grew more terrible as each day passed. We managed to walk and crawl to a settlement, and for this we gave thanks in prayer. But we were not to know that yellow fever had stricken those kindly folk and that we, too, would fall

victim. Before another month had gone only three of us remained alive—two of the seamen and myself.”

The priest smoothed her forehead and told her not to tax her failing strength too far; but she continued: “After hardship and privation, we reached civilization; on our journey my two companions treated me hard, dragged me along with them when I was too weak to walk, and made me suffer every kind of iniquity before deserting me. In time, after recovering health and working in three different jobs, I saved enough money to take passage in a ship bound for New Zealand, and so, at last, I reached here, and made this small room my home. There was nothing more I wanted, save peace . . . and the chance to try to forget everything that had happened.”

She smiled once more, and there was infinite understanding in her eyes; “Men will commit many crimes for gold,” she faltered, “but this must surely have been one of the worst. One of my two brutal companions disappeared entirely and I never heard of him again; the other was arrested, months later, on a charge of murder, and, after trial, was hanged in San Francisco. Now . . . now that my time has come, I wanted to tell all I knew of what has for so long been a mystery.”

The priest spoke in a low voice: “And your real name?”

“Mary Nolan. It was in that name that I engaged as nurse to Mrs. de Carteret and her three children.”

It was in 1899, forty-six years after the *Madagascar* sailed out of Port Philip Roads on her last, tragic voyage, that confirmation of nurse Mary Nolan’s story was obtained in Melbourne, the result of searching investigations carried out by lawyers who acted for surviving relatives of the de Carteret family.

## 7.

### *Ill-Fated "Colossus of the Seas"*

It was a boisterous period in American marine history; Yankee privateers, Yankee packets, and Yankee clippers were logging a fame that would endure long after steam-driven ships had ousted vessels which carried vast expanses of canvas. And the picturesque aspect of the ocean venturers of this era was not less important than the economic and political.

A round dozen energetic men were showing the world what was meant by enterprise; men like Elias Hasket Derby, of Salem, whose sailing ships were to blaze the trail to Russia and Cape Town, showing the flag from Bombay to Calcutta; men like New Bedford's foundling, Fish, founder of the Swallowtail Line of clippers; men like the Long Island Quaker, Isaac Wright, owner of the tall Black Ball liners; and George Law, whose Cuban line of fast windjammers were very nearly responsible for war with Spain.

This bustling, rip-roaring era of prosperity had started with the development of the slave trade, with ships carrying cotton to England and, from there, cotton products to West Africa, where they were bartered for Negro

slaves captured by Arab dealers. These unfortunates were shipped to the West Indies and America, and—a strange juxtaposition—many of them were sold to the very plantations which were providing the raw material for the growing cotton industry of England. By 1769, when slaving reached its highest peak, one-third of the total tonnage of ships flying the British flag had been built in New England shipyards; and along New York's East River front sawmills and timber yards went up overnight. And well they might, for an oak-hulled clipper, with tall white pine masts, built anywhere in New York, Maine, or Massachusetts, cost only one-half of what it did in British shipyards.

Yankee sailing ships were carrying the necessities of human life to Europe, Africa, Spain, Portugal, India, Russia; this was the glory of American sailing ships, those splendid windjammers built for speed rather than cargo-carrying capacity, and embodying more of the sheer poetry of the Seven Seas than any other type of ship anywhere else in the world; slender, streamlined, sharp-bowed craft these, carrying a great spread of sailcloth, worthy of the names they carried, too; intended to stretch out on long voyages to the farthest seas.

There remained, however, one great area of known trade which eluded those Yankees. This was Asia, monopolized by Europe, whose Oriental traffic was employing the largest windjammers in the world, built, equipped, and armed like regular men-of-war. And so to Job Prince, merchant and seaman, went Major Samuel Shaw, lately aide-de-camp to General Knox, Washington's chief of artillery, and a friend, Captain Randall. They painted an enticing picture, pointed out to Prince that it was time

America created her own East India Company to compete against Europe; that this Oriental traffic offered the world's most glittering prize. Job Prince listened attentively and asked Shaw and Randall their opinions about the type of vessel that would be needed. They told him: "She would need be along the lines of an English East Indiaman we saw last year in Canton; a beauty she was, called the *New Triumph*."

That week, Job Prince called in Captain William Hackett, of Amesbury on the Merrimac, designer of the frigate *Alliance*, swiftest and most successful of American cruisers in the Revolution, and gave him the order to "produce the most beautiful ship the world ever saw." A ship to be called *Massachusetts*; a two-decker she would be, with keel length of 116 feet, a beam of 36 feet; a full-rigger she must be, of not less than 600 tons, and mounting a complete battery of cannon.

So she took shape, this "Colossus of the Seas," and before and after her launching, experts, critics, and very ordinary folk came to gaze on her lines and admire, give praise, or criticize. They flocked to Quincy, just south of Boston, and said their say of her: she would be "an event of national importance"; she would surely be "the greatest merchantman ever built in the United States," a veritable colossus, they said. They turned a deaf ear to critics who dared suggest that they were "aghast" and that this big windjammer was "presumptuous of her builders." What was most amazing, and neither critics nor admirers disagreed on this point, was the sheer speed of her construction, for she grew taller and longer as they stood watching.

Job Prince gave a banquet for folk in every rank of

society, for officers from five French warships lying in Boston Harbor, and for Captain John Linzee of the British frigate *Penelope*. He dined and wined them all and listened, gratified, to the plaudits of his enthusiastic guests. They toasted Prince and his new ship, and said that she was "as perfect a model as art could permit." That night Prince, electing himself captain, sat in his cabin considering "hundreds of applications made by persons of the best character" to engage as her crew. For officers, Prince chose Captain Amasa Delano as first mate and three former commanders of windjammers as second, third, and fourth mates.

They signed ship's articles, and told Prince: "As one man, we are honored and proud to hold subordinate rank in a voyage of such tremendous national importance." Then the five officers signed on the remainder of the crew: purser, surgeon, several midshipmen, carpenter, bo'sun, gunner, and, finally, a crew of sixty-seven to serve before the mast.

They took aboard her cargo, including several hundred barrels of good American beef. They stowed those barrels right at the bottom of her holds, and atop them hundreds of masts and spars, and hermetically sealed the cargo spaces. Nobody seemed to remember, or give a thought to, the grim fact that those masts and spars had been cut in midwinter; that they were coated with ice and mud; that all of it was green wood. There were other more important things to think of, anyway.

So, on the morning of March 31, 1790, out from Boston Harbor went the *Massachusetts*, to undertake her maiden voyage—as Captain Job Prince put it, "with the

brightest of auspices"—to make her own special history on the Seven Seas.

It was a full four days later that Prince, Delano, and the other officers realized with a shock that the big ship had sailed without a ship's chronometer and that not one among their number was able to work out lunar observations. This was absurd, preposterous. This sort of thing, they told each other, could never happen. But it had! Together, Prince and Delano presented themselves at the stateroom occupied by Major Samuel Shaw, part owner in the venture; they told him: "This looks bad!"

Shaw eyed the two men: "So, gentlemen, with this so-called 'Colossus of the Seas' of ours—this 'vast ship' as everybody called her, with which we were to make marine history and lay secure foundations for an American East India Company—we go to sea, on our maiden voyage, without the necessary equipment to enable any one of her officers to navigate her save by a process of trial and error? Tell me, Mister Delano, just what were you doing the day we sailed? Checking over the navigating gear? Or just *what*?"

"I hoisted our colors, Major, and checked the stowage of the cargo. That kept me busy enough——"

"Too busy, it would appear, to attend to a little job like making certain you had a proper chronometer aboard? Well—don't stand there gaping at me; tell me, what do you intend doing now?"

"There's only one course open to us, Major, and that is to feel our way to the coast of Africa, then creep right down the coast to Cape Town, and get our bearings by the color of the seas. We can get a bearing, too, by sighting Cape Verde, Major."

Shaw grunted: "I'm no seafaring man, Prince, and it's your job, not mine, to see that we make this voyage in safety."

The weather deteriorated, and Cape Verde failed to come within sight; they headed due east, feeling their perilous way every mile, and turned south, skirted the reef-lined shores of South Africa, cleared for the Indian Ocean, and set their course by dead reckoning for Java Head, that great landmark of all East Indiamen. The rest would be moderately simple: through the Suda Strait, thence to Batavia, east to Macassar, thence north through the China Sea to end this maiden voyage at Macao. And the sharp bows of the *Massachusetts* sheared their knife-like way forward . . .

But her sixty-seven crew thought differently, and in their quarters the men sat muttering together; they reminded each other of Old Moll, the woman who lived back home in Lynn, who herself had been responsible for mass desertion of two entire crews before they, the present sixty-seven of them, had stepped aboard to sign articles. They said they would never have put their signature to those ship's papers had they known what Moll prophesied; and when they *had* known it was too late. Too late to turn back in a ship this size *already doomed before she moved a yard out of Quincy!* Old Moll had said that, and Moll knew what she was saying—for those strange eyes of hers looked far beyond mere horizons. They looked, in fact, right into the dim future; and sailormen were not superstitious for nothing.

Some of the muttering crew tried to make light of the soothsayer's prophesies, and said that the design and the



construction of their ship had been proven faultless; that she was the achievement of skilled Yankee craftsmen who knew their job, and who had built such famous ships as the *Columbia*, and no harm had come to *them*; so why should harm come to the *Massachusetts*? It was just a tale told by a crazy woman called Old Moll.

But in his stateroom Major Shaw, newly appointed American Consul for China and principal shareholder in the big windjammer, who also had heard rumors of the doom foretold by Moll, was preparing for the worst. And within forty-eight hours, Shaw believed that the very worst was happening; here, in this unknown area of turbulent seas, the elements themselves appeared to combine and prepare to deliver the death blow to this great ship. By dawn next day Amasa Delano forced open the door of the stateroom, found Shaw clinging desperately to a stanchion, told him: "Better that you don't venture on deck, Major, for we've been hit hard by a typhoon and only God Himself can help us now!" He was gone, leaving Shaw to his own devices and his fears. For a full two days the big ship beat her passage back and forward, running into the teeth of tearing winds, heaved into the lowering, gray skies by seas that were mountains of tremendous water in a labyrinth of land and ocean. So, after making her nightmare passage "by guess and by golly" from Boston, the *Massachusetts* reached Canton, and safely alongside, opened her cargo hatches and invited buyers aboard.

They came, those buyers, and sniffed, and plugged their nostrils, and demanded to be told just what kind of grim joke the owners of the *Massachusetts* thought they were

playing? The ship, they challenged, was no more than a floating ruin; and she was rotten, from bowsprit to stern, from the top of her tall masts right down to her keel; they charged Shaw and Prince that they "could smell the worms in her." Then they stepped ashore, turned their backs, disgusted, on this "perfect model of a ship as art would permit."

It was a sorry picture, for here was a vessel whose design had been without flaw, whose construction was of the best—*save for that vital matter of her timbers*; for they had built *Massachusetts* from newly cut, unseasoned white oak, and now, at the end of this maiden voyage, she was almost apart at her seams. Her cargo itself—that was wholly rotten, and not worth a man's breath to make a bid for it, even as junk! They had so carefully hermetically sealed the cargo hatches; and now when they were opened, the close air, the humidity of the tropical seas, had done their worst; the green masts and spars were soggy, spongy, useless; and, beneath them, the prime American beef in barrels was crawling with maggots.

Late that day Major Shaw stepped aboard with a prospective buyer, and was told: "As a seagoing vessel, mister, she ain't worth a second thought; she'd not make ten nautical miles in safety . . . but I reckon she's got a few bits and pieces I could use for ship repair. Taking her as a job lot, mister, I'll give you sixty-five thousand dollars, cash."

It was a deal. Shaw clinched it on the spot; Amasa Delano hauled down her national colors, and, together with his three fellow officers, the purser, surgeon, midshipmen, carpenter, bo'sun, gunner and sixty-seven seamen, was left "to make your way back home as best you can."

And Major Samuel Shaw, quitting his new consular appointment before he even began, took passage in a regular liner bound for Boston, died on the voyage, and was buried at sea off the Cape of Good Hope. So vanished the dream of America's East India Company and her "Colossus of the Seas."

## 8.

### *Out of an Atlantic Fog*

THE AGE of earthquakes is not passed; it never will pass. Dotted around the world are a number of gigantic natural safety valves, ready to overwhelm folk who live near them; from time to time geologists have claimed that the world was preparing for yet another vast upheaval caused by tensions set up by shrinkage of the earth's surface as it cools. Some of those eminent men have indeed predicted that a period of long, sustained volcanic action would mean for this world the advent of another Ice Age.

That may be. The fact remains that the horrors which Vesuvius wrought on ancient Pompeii in A.D. 79 were to be repeated in 1908. In that tragic year, an earthquake shook Sicily and Calabria, almost wiped out Messina and neighboring towns, killed 77,283 inhabitants, and injured another 95,000. It was the worst eruption in Italy for more than two centuries.

For more than a week afterward there was almost complete darkness over a radius of three hundred miles, due to volcanic dust clouds high in the heavens. In one village alone more than four hundred folk lost their lives. When

it was over, when daylight returned once more and those who survived had gathered their senses and looked around them on what had once been happy communities, hundreds of them swore they could risk it no more. They would gather together their few remaining personal possessions and get out, far away across the seas, to some other country where Nature might treat them more gently.

Treasured bundles clutched tight to their bodies, eight hundred of those survivors made their way, shortly after Christmas, 1908, to the dockside and climbed aboard the steamship *Florida*; ahead of them, three thousand miles to the westward, lay their new Eldorado, America, and a new life, new hope. And so the *Florida* pulled out, turned her blunt nose toward the North Atlantic, and went her way. All being well, she would tie up in New York Harbor toward the end of January.

That December and January, the North Atlantic was plagued by fog; the Grand Banks fog that seafaring men have always respected and dreaded. It is a type of fog that closes in on ships and men, sends a chill right through to the human bones, and makes life afloat something strange and uncanny. And it brings an eerie silence when ships move so slowly that they appear to be hove to, with no sound aboard except a foghorn forward moaning warning notes to everything near.

Aboard *Florida*, her master, Captain Ruspini, realizing that the nerves of his emigrant passengers were frayed to breaking point, eased his ship down, prepared to nurse her and his charges throughout the voyage, and hoped for the best. Ruspini was a capable man, a seaman who knew his job and knew the North Atlantic in all its varied moods.

Now his was an unenviable task; for the least sign of real trouble could end in panic.

Out of New York on January 22 steamed the White Star Line 15,000-ton *Republic*, bound for Mediterranean ports with 250 first-class and 211 steerage-class passengers, and a crew totaling 300. Somewhere in her vicinity were the United States Lines *New York*, the French Line *Lorraine*, the Anchor Lines *Furnessia*, the Cunarder *Lucania*, and White Star's 23,876-ton *Baltic*. At that period, the 12,000-ton, twenty-one-knot *Lucania* was acknowledged "greyhound" of the North Atlantic mail service. And in those days, too, not more than 180 ocean-going ships were equipped with a newfangled device called wireless. Clumsy affairs they were, fed directly from the ships' dynamo, or in emergency from a twenty-four-volt battery.

One hundred and seventy-five miles east of Ambrose Light, *Republic* ran into typical North Atlantic fog; Captain Sealby immediately reduced speed, and passed an order that the foghorn be started and kept going until the opaque veil lifted clear and looked as if it would stay that way. Meanwhile extra lookouts were posted forward, and the big liner began feeling her way into a world that had by now closed right in. So throughout that first night out of New York, *Republic* went ahead; the miles slipped by, night came with an extra darkness; and the hours were tolled away between crow's nest and bridge. And then . . .

The radio room aboard *Baltic* was a small, unpretentious affair built aft of the second-class deck; apart from its vital equipment, it contained a couple of bunks, the usual necessities and essentials life at sea requires. It was

a "two-man ship," one operator doing his best to sleep off watch against the incessant noise of the spark and of various folk, passengers and crew, entering and talking with the duty man.

Around five o'clock that morning the room was quiet; in his bunk the second radio operator slept out the remainder of his spell off watch, and at his transmitter and receiving gear sat Marconi man H. J. Tattersall, phones clamped to his ears. It was quiet, very quiet. It looked as if it might be a totally uneventful trip after all. It was silent, very silent, until Tattersall sat rigidly in his chair, heard that all-compelling sound—a distress signal. "CQD CQD CQD SC SC SC *Republic* rammed by unknown steamship twenty-six miles southwest Nantucket light-ship."

The signal came from Siasconsett radio station; the hands of the radio room clock stood at precisely 5:30 A.M.

Tattersall looked across the small room at his sleeping assistant; he had no telephone communication with the bridge, and this was no time to chance trying to wake a fellow all out in his bunk. Slipping the phones from his head, he ran out of the room, climbed the bridge companion ladder, and handed the message to Captain Ransome.

"Bad business, this. We're little more than a hundred miles from Sandy Hook. That means roughly eighty to westward of her reported last position. *And we're getting short of fuel.*"

*Baltic*, inward bound, had passed Nantucket; the distance separating the liner from the stricken *Republic* was not extreme, but in heavy fog a ship could easily spend fruitless hours seeking another, going to her aid; and at

the end of such a search, with failure, could conceivably herself become a menace to other shipping. Ransome reached a snap decision. He issued his order to turn the *Baltic* from her course and steam back with all speed toward the scene of disaster. Black smoke poured from her tall funnels as firemen fed extra coal into her hungry furnaces. It was to be a touch-and-go operation, for everybody, every ship concerned; somewhere out here, tight in the grip of this gray blanket, somewhere lives were at stake.

Ashore, at Siasconsett, operator Albert Ginman called all other ships in the immediate area—called *Lucania*, *Lorraine*, *Furnessia*, repeated *Republic's* plea for aid, gave her last reported position. For a while, sheer pandemonium reigned in that opaque air off the American coast as Ginman told all vessels listening that *Republic's* spark was now far too weak to reach them direct, though her wireless operator, Jack Binns, was reporting that he could hear Siasconsett signals—and that the *Republic* was sinking slowly beneath his feet as he listened.

For more than two hours, aboard the *Baltic*, Tattersall sat at his instrument, searching the air for news. Then it came. The unknown steamship which had rammed the big White Star liner was a vessel giving her call sign and her name as *Florida*, with eight hundred panic-stricken emigrants aboard.

The Italian vessel had struck *Republic* full and square amidships, flooding her engine room, stripping her radio man of the power he needed to maintain contact with other shipping. Jack Binns was falling back on his twenty-four-volt emergency batteries, working what



radio men called "plain signals," and they were fast becoming weaker and weaker.

By noon, with the fog still thick, Binns at his key completed the twentieth of the two hundred calls he was to make that fateful day. At that hour too, aboard the *Baltic*, Tattersall was groping the air, trying to find the position of *Republic*; all he had picked up so far were signals which could be coming from any place. Above his radio room, from the bridge of *Baltic*, Captain Ransome zigzagged his vessel back and forward, while rockets and maroons exploded high in the air above and the liner's foghorn added to the rising crescendo of sound. Then came Siasconsett again, this time asking for news for American editors intent on splashing banner headlines right across the front pages of their next editions.

Asked permission to give the shore station brief details of the position as it was, Ransome snapped: "No! We're not here to feed newspapers. Not at a time like this. Tell 'em those are my orders; tell 'em it's no use asking; tell 'em any darned thing you like—but don't give them what they want. It's a waste of precious time. It'd distract attention from the *Republic*, from the job we've got in hand."

On his emergency power, Binns continued to send out radio signals, giving *Republic's* position; he managed to contact *Lorraine* and *Baltic*, but neither vessel could find *Republic*. Then, in late afternoon, signal strength began to vary, coming in weak, then stronger, then weaker again; that meant the rescue ships already in touch were approaching the stricken vessel at an angle, then steaming away. Night set in. Down to the radio room Captain Ran-

some sent word ordering a signal to be broadcast to *Republic*, warning her captain that his supply of rockets and maroons was nearly exhausted, asking all aboard the rammed ship to listen and watch carefully. In less than ten minutes from now *Baltic* would fire her last remaining maroon. Ransome gave word to fire; the maroon exploded. Faintly, *Republic* heard the sound, gave her position, and *Baltic* changed course. By precisely six o'clock *Baltic* could make out a black shape on her port bow. It was *Republic*.

The fog was lifting, but now seas were building up and the position was no easier. Captain Ransome asked: "Where are your passengers, *Republic*?" "Taken off by *Florida*; the transfer has gone on since eight this morning, difficult and hazardous but not one life has been lost. We are still afloat, and mean to try to reach land."

"I'll come alongside," Ransome told Sealby, "and take off your crew."

"Some of them," Sealby replied, "but not all; I'm staying aboard with a skeleton crew. I'll need their help if we're to try saving the ship. The men I need have volunteered to remain; they include my radio operator, Binns, and he'll send signals asking for the assistance of tugs."

"Now the news has reached the papers," Ransome grinned, "you'll probably have more tugs than you need!"

Somewhere in the vicinity of the two ships lay the *Florida*, and she carried no radio. *Baltic* set out in search of her. Aboard the Italian were her own 800 emigrant passengers with the additional 761 transferred from *Republic*; that meant no further time must be lost.

So *Baltic* found the Italian ship, closed her, hove to,

lowered lifeboats to commence transfer operations; the White Star liner's gangway was lowered, and her bo'sun, a genial giant of a man, strong as they made them, took station on the platform immediately above the seas. A ten-foot swell was running, but he grinned across at the lifeboats as they lined up and invited those in them: "Take y'r chance, ladies 'n' gentlemen. It isn't hard, once you try properly. I'm ready for the lot o' you!"

He leaned forward, extended a long right arm, waited the opportune moment, encircled the waist of each woman passenger, and, with a vast inward swing, heaved her out of the lifeboat onto the gangway platform. Only once did the bo'sun miss, when a woman whose physical charms were, to say the least, overgenerous, slipped out of the encircling arm, plopped into the sea, gasped, and was hauled out in a split second, wet but none the worse for it all.

By midnight, 1,240 passengers and 300 crew were taken off the *Florida*, taken aboard *Baltic*, tended by stewards and stewardesses, given first aid, fed, and bedded down in comfort, warmth, and safety. And, her bows smashed and stove in, her two forward holds waterlogged, *Florida* elected to put about and slowly make for New York Harbor under her own steam. She reached there without further incident.

*Republic*, still afloat, with attendant tugs and other craft carrying reporters and photographers, by now had been taken in tow by an ocean-going tug, *Gresham*, with the destroyer *Seneca* ahead and the Anchor Line *Furnessia* in station astern. The White Star liner had but one undamaged bulkhead to keep her afloat; and now, con-

voyed, she began her hazardous journey, but immediately south of Martha's Vineyard it was obvious she would never make it.

Boats from escorting ships were lowered, but before they could begin pulling toward *Republic* she heeled over and plunged, stern first, into the seas. As she went, her skeleton crew flung themselves into the water and struck out to save being drawn down into the vortex of swirling water. Sealby stuck at his post and disappeared; searchlights flickered, swung around in great arcs, picked him up swarming along his ship's foremast, and to this he clung until he disappeared from sight. But Captain Sealby and his gallant skeleton crew were later picked up, uninjured, and taken aboard the escort ships.

Just about at the end of his tether, Jack Binns, who had been at his radio instruments without a break since the collision, stepped ashore with Captain Sealby on the White Star pier, New York, and was seized and carried shoulder high through crowds delirious with excitement and praise. They marched the two of them along the streets, heralded the approach of the procession with an assortment of musical instruments, took a roundabout route, and returned Sealby and Binns, a little the worse for it all, to the White Star offices. Then the crowd looked for Captain Ruspini, master of the *Florida*, and gave him similar treatment.

Robert H. Ingersoll, chairman of the Ingersoll Watch Company, a passenger aboard *Baltic*, struck a happy note; he made himself personally responsible for special medals commemorating what might well have ended in appalling tragedy. Every member of the crews of *Baltic*, *Republic*, and *Florida* was presented with a token, four of which

were struck in gold and presented to Captain Sealby, Captain Ransome, Captain Ruspini, and wireless man Jack Binns. The medals bore on one side the call CQD (a composite signal of that period, indicating "All Stations"—CQ; and "Distress"—D) at the top, a likeness of the ship in center, and underneath the words RMS *Republic*. On the reverse side: "From the saloon passengers of RMS *Baltic* and RMS *Republic* to officers and crews of RMS *Republic*, *Baltic* and SS *Florida*, for heroism and gallantry, commemorating the rescue of over 1,700 souls. January 24, 1909."

And H. G. Tattersall, trim, neat, military-mustached, twinkle-eyed, fifty-two hours without sleep, put his head on the pillow of his bunk and passed clean out. He felt he had had enough.

## 9.

### *A Fortune off Anglesey*

EVERY so often, the seas around Britain go mad. It happened on the last day of January and the first two days of February, 1953, when one of the greatest storms in living memory—a combination of “intense depressions” beloved of the meteorologists and the British Broadcasting Corporation, violent winds sometimes exceeding one hundred miles an hour, a full moon, and the ragged, indented coast line—produced havoc ashore and among shipping.

It happened much the same way in October, 1859, when hurricane weather scythed across the Western Approaches, battered down defenses around Anglesey, swept inland, destroyed the railway between Chester and Birkenhead, obliterated a vast embankment, swamped five boats moored in the Dee, hoisted a large bark off Pwllheli and left it high and dry hundreds of yards inland. To the southward, the frenzy dashed a ship to pieces at Rye in Sussex, and another at Dungeness; destroyed barges and larger craft at Stratton, near Bude; struck at Bristol, where it wiped out three pilot boats; and tore to shreds a freighter at Rotterdam, another off the Dulus Rocks, a

schooner near Point of Ayr, and a dozen more in various places in the North Sea, the Irish Sea, and the English Channel. But the most terrible tragedy of all was the loss of the Liverpool ship *Royal Charter*.

Those were spacious days; the days of the tall clipper ships, pacemakers all of them, whose names will live forever in the history of merchant shipping; exciting days too, when from America, Canada, Scandinavia, and Europe, thousands of men, hundreds with wives and children, converged on Liverpool, dreaming of millionaire-dom overnight and ready to suffer torments to achieve their dream.

For right across the world, in Australia, at places whose very names spelled romance—Forrest Creek, Bendigo, Ararat, Dunolly—men had found gold. Australia was on the map, and in a big way. And on Merseyside, where shipowners had long since resigned themselves to an ever increasing slump in carrying trade, into the Port of Liverpool, on that bright, sunny morning, August 31, 1852, sails furled, bunting streaming gaily from rigging, came the Eagle Line wind ship *Albatross*, with \$250,000 worth of alluvial gold in her captain's room, and with her officers and crew ready to tell almost unbelievable stories of fabulous fortunes just waiting to be picked up "down under."

A steady stream of gold-hungry emigrants started converging on Liverpool, ready to pay their last penny for a passage to the gold fields, ready to make the five-month voyage under unspeakable conditions in ill-ventilated, badly equipped ships little better than the convict hulks of one hundred years before. Shipping took a brand-new lease on life; competition was here, on Liverpool's own doorstep, and to spare. That was the year that put James

Nicol Forbes squarely on Britain's mercantile marine map; "Bully" Forbes, they called him, the skipper, Aberdeen-born, who had come to Liverpool penniless, and was given command of his first ship, the *Marco Polo*, owned by James Baines, son of a woman who owned a homemade cake shop back of the town.

It was Forbes who, with a crew of 30 hard-living seamen and 930 emigrants, pulled out from Liverpool in the *Marco Polo* and made a record passage of sixty-eight days to Port Philip Roads, beating the steamship run by a clear week. And there, at Hobson's Bay, Forbes found nearly fifty ships held up through mass desertion of crews who had quit to seek gold. But he brought his own pace-maker back to Merseyside, and when she fetched up in the Liverpool River, from fore to aft she carried a vast expanse of sailcloth on which Forbes himself had painted the legend, "The Fastest Ship in the World!"

Traditionally, he was credited with the "Hell or Melbourne" challenge, and whether it is true or not, the fact remains he drove his ships like a man possessed—and died, a broken, bitter man, after losing the ill-fated *Schomberg*, sad, silent, a mere ghost of what he had been, at the age of fifty-two in a Liverpool back street overlooking the river he had known so well.

But there was one man who challenged "Bully" Forbes, defied him to beat his own ship on the Liverpool-Melbourne emigrant run. A man named Taylor, he was; Captain Taylor, master of the Gibbs Bright Company's 3,000-ton three-masted *Royal Charter*. That ship, said sailormen, was born under a hoodoo.

The history of the ship certainly shows that ill fortune dogged her from the start. Launched in August, 1854,



when shipowners in Britain were scrambling for profits and shipbuilders worked around the clock building new tonnage, *Royal Charter* heeled over, ran aground and was refloated with difficulty. Brought into the Liverpool River, she was made ready for her maiden voyage.

She pulled out, Melbourne-bound, that November; under her deck was a heavy cargo; in her passenger accommodation were hundreds of gold-hungry men, with some women and children. She made heavy going down to the coast of Spain, and Taylor reckoned the rest of the trip would be too tricky as she was. He put her about, made for Plymouth, had some of her cargo lifted out, left it there—and made Melbourne in a record run of fifty-nine days, nine days better than rival “Bully” Forbes. Captain Taylor was well pleased with *Royal Charter*’s splendid performance; but he had failed to shake off his ship’s hoodoo.

For four uneventful trips he did his best to lower his own record, but failed. On the fifth run *Royal Charter* caught fire, but the crew fought like demons, quenched the flames, brought her home almost a ruin, left her in dock for repair and refit, then drifted to their homes until they were wanted again.

Onto Liverpool’s waterfront, twelve months earlier, walked a young man from Anglesey; in a window he had stopped to read the notice:

For passengers, parcels and mail, having commodious accommodation, the Black Ball Line *Marco Polo*, unrivalled by any other vessel, with a commander whose ability and kindness to passengers are well known, to sail for Melbourne.

Young Jack Lewis had come to Liverpool for just that reason; to find a likely ship that would take him out to the Australian gold fields—for the old folk left behind in that little old cottage whose low windows overlooked Moelfre Bay. That little old cottage was Home. It had been his birthplace. It held, now, all he held dear—his mother and father. And Jack wanted no more than the chance to help them as they had helped him; wanted to return to them rich, with money enough to buy the cottage for them, and an adjoining strip of land, and give them comfort and freedom from poverty for the rest of their lives. So he sailed.

The months sped past. Then one day in Melbourne, bronzed by the scorching sun, sinewy, strong, ready to match the next man when it came to living rough and tearing the bowels out of the earth to find the precious yellow metal, pockets lined with bank notes exchanged for his strike and with a comfortable-feeling poke of it in carpetbag, a broader, more confident Jack Lewis walked into a shipping office, bought a ticket for Liverpool, and walked out onto the street again—dreaming, maybe, of the homecoming that awaited him, of the two old folk who would be there to greet him back at the cottage at Moelfre Bay.

Taylor warped *Royal Charter* out of Melbourne in September, 1859, well pleased with life in general. Back on Merseyside, with reasonable luck throughout the trip, he would step ashore, seek out any other captain who felt like pacemaking, and tell him just what *Royal Charter* could do when she caught the right slant of wind in her sails, put her forefoot into the seas, parted them in a mist

of spray and took to her heels, ladylike and dignified as a ship of her class should do always.

He yelled to Melbourne, as the shore receded: "You'll see me back long before mid-November, and I'll come a-flying, see if I don't!" Then he walked around his ship, walked below deck, inspected the accommodations, wiped away a speck of dust here, a smudge there on her gleaming whitework, talked with some of his 494 passengers, and assured them they "would be home in no time" after a quite uneventful voyage. Was everything to their liking? It was? Excellent. And, with that, he left them to their own devices.

In his room, Taylor unlocked a cabinet, lifted out a bottle and a glass, poured a generous tot of golden liquid, downed it, smacked his lips; replaced the bottle and glass, relocked the cabinet, unfolded charts, mused as he did so. A methodical man, Taylor liked things in their correct places.

He walked slowly across to the helmsman, gave him his course, watched satisfied as the wheel spun; watched, too, with satisfaction her every move, noting that she went her way just as he wanted her to go. Nothing worried Captain Taylor, a supremely happy man.

The miles sped past, the seas opened for *Royal Charter*, closed behind her, left a white wake that zigzagged as the currents and eddies caught at it, dispersed it until it disappeared beyond the far horizon. This was uneventful, a happy trip, and with gold below deck and in the passengers' baggage worth a king's ransom—seventy-nine thousand ounces of it alone locked away in his own strong room, designed by the builders especially for that pur-

pose so long as the yellow metal held out in Australia.

*Royal Charter* took the bit between her teeth as she neared the English Channel and raced to the north, toward Queenstown. It was nearly over now, this trip; back in Liverpool Taylor would take a spell ashore, see what life had to offer a man who knew just how well to live, then take *Royal Charter* out once more, heading her south for Melbourne and yet more alluvial gold. Taylor was sitting comfortably in his room, sipping from the glass, when somebody knocked at the door. He slipped the bottle and glass back into the cabinet, locked it, regained his seat, and composed himself.

"Come in."

Four passengers entered, closed the door behind them, coughed, and looked a trifle sheepishly from one to another.

"Eh . . . um . . . Captain Taylor." Their spokesman found voice, coughed apologetically, and continued: "We've never done anything like this before, haven't had the chance, y'see, but . . . well"—he stretched out an arm holding a neat leather bag and thrust it toward Taylor—"there're nearly four hundred of us aboard this vessel, and we felt . . . we felt it's been such a comfortable voyage, and so safe and no distress or sickness among any one of us in your capable hands, we . . . um . . . took the great liberty of having a whip-round, y'see. So we'd like you to accept this from the lot of us, as a . . . um . . . a kind of testimonial. Our gratitude, as it were, to you, for making our return voyage home so very pleasant . . ."

They were gone, the four of them, before Taylor had a chance of replying, before he could even loose the cord

of the bag and spill its contents out on his lap. And when it came, it opened his eyes, wide. Slowly, with typical method, he walked over to his cabinet, made room for the gift, locked it away, and decided he ought to hold some kind of personal reception in the saloon before the ship docked. Yes, he would do that. Then someone else tapped on his door.

"Come in."

The visitor was a man of Taylor's own stamp; the pair of them might well have come out of the same mold.

"Mornin', Cap'n Withers, sir. Haven't had the pleasure of your company much. My stewards treated you well? If any man hasn't, you've only to say so and I'll . . . I'll log him, take a week's pay out of his miserable pocket before he even draws it."

"It's been one of the most pleasant trips I've made, Taylor, thanks to you. Didn't think I'd be traveling in style like this, after I lost my own ship last May off New Nantucket. Bad business, was that. But a man never knows for certain just what he might run into, even the last day or two of a voyage. That's the way it was with me. Uneventful most of the way, then—phut!—and the *Virginia* went in a flash, before I could do a thing to keep her safe. First command I've ever lost, and that sort of thing hurts a man."

Taylor walked over to the cabinet, produced the bottle and two glasses, poured generous helpings, and handed one to his guest.

"Few more hours, Cap'n Withers, sir, and it's home again for the lot of us. You'll get another ship, never fear, and if I can put in a word for you, you've only to say; not that I'm meaning to interfere or be impertinent,

you'll understand. And it's been a real pleasure having you aboard."

That night the wind came up out of the nor'west, veering unexpectedly from the exact opposite direction and jabbing at *Royal Charter*, spitefully, in short-arm punches, testing her, putting her on her mettle, challenging her, as one boxer challenges another, to come out of her corner and take it on the chin. Long before dawn those winds had strengthened, piling up the seas, gathering them within its ferocious grip, sending them in great lumps pouring at and across the tall three-master until her three thousand tons shivered under every succeeding blow. This wind had teeth in it, teeth that tried hard to take the *Royal Charter* tight and crunch its bones, like a gourmet tackling a chicken's leg.

In mid-morning, with the weather still deteriorating and double watches set on deck, Taylor passed word to the chief steward requesting him to inform all passengers that coffee and light refreshments would be served in the main saloon; that he intended coming among them to make a brief speech of thanks for their testimonial. But it would have to be brief, unfortunately, for conditions were not too good; with only a few hours to go before they reached the Mersey, Taylor wanted no accidents among his passengers, no harm to come to any one of them.

Thirty minutes later, Captain Taylor stepped into the saloon, beamed at his assembled passengers.

"I . . . er . . . I wanted to say a word of thanks . . ."

It was then the sea struck—hard, terribly, savagely hard—and struck again, and again, until folk were thrown to

the saloon deck, bruised and cut about body and legs.

Somebody yelled: "God have mercy on us!" A woman screamed. Children cried out in terror. A dozen men started a rush for the deck. Taylor stopped them in their stride.

"No need for that, you men. A wind got the ship, nothing worse than that. She's gone through harder weather than this and been seaworthy. It'll pass——"

A man ran screaming out of the saloon, brushing past Taylor, elbowing him out of the way.

"Pass off, you say? It'll not pass. She's going to sink, I know it. I'm getting out, d'you hear? I've got a hundred thousand in gold in my bag. I'm not losing that or my life. Try stopping me!" He was gone.

Captain Taylor turned toward his passengers, modulated his voice: "There's to be no more of that, ladies and gentlemen. A man like him's no use to anybody at a time like now. We've run into a bad spell of weather, and the winds are pushing the seas against the ship, but I've known worse, much worse. You came here to listen to a word of thanks from me for your gesture, paying me the compliment of responsibility for a pleasant and safe voyage home. That's what I'm here for, to take you all safely into the Liverpool River. And that's what I'll do. You'll please excuse me, now; there's work to do on deck."

Up there on deck, Taylor looked around him, and knew in a flash it would be a hazardous affair taking his ship safely out of this welter of frenzied seas. They were right off Port Helaeth now, with Moelfre Bay in the dim distance, visible through driving rain that came at the ship flat, horizontal, shrieking at the men who fought

their way across open space. Taylor called to a vague figure, racing for shelter.

"You a passenger?"

"No, sir. Joe Rogers, seaman."

And then it came, a monster sea, a terrifying weight of water that took *Royal Charter* in its grip, lifted it high, sent it crashing down again, broke it clean in two parts.

"Heaven help us!"

"This is it, Rogers. This is the end. And I never suspected——"

"Give me a line, sir. I'll fasten it around me, go over the rail, swim for the shore. There's not more than twelve yards between us and dry land. Just give me that line, and when I'm ashore, bend a heavier line on, let me haul it in, and you can get a bo'sun's chair rigged. Get everyone ashore in safety that way."

So they gave Joe Rogers his line, watched him wrap it around his body; watched, too, as he climbed the ship's rail, paused a second, took a header into the white spume below. And as he went, Rogers yelled: "Here goes, fellers! If I die, I die. If I can get ashore, I'll save the lot of you."

They watched him go; watched as he disappeared in that welter of water, reappeared, struck out; watched as he climbed painfully ashore, dragging his right leg, limp and broken; watched as he made his way, foot by foot, to higher land and there made fast the line from around his body. He stood erect, balanced on one leg, waved encouragement to them; then, slowly, foot by foot, hauled in the stouter line made fast to the manila. Thirty minutes later the bosun's chair was rigged . . . and one



seaman after another was hoisted from the ship to shore, to safety. *One seaman after another.* But not one passenger.

Wally Hughes, apprentice, standing on deck waiting orders, felt the *Royal Charter* part beneath his feet. He was flung into the seas, struck senseless by baulks, washed ashore, pinned there until someone released him and gave him into the care of his namesake, the Reverend Hughes, rector of Llanalltgo Church, who had raced to the scene to give what help he could.

Captain Taylor called encouragement to his crew, was struck down by a monstrous sea, regained his feet, was struck down again; then another sea poured across the deck, swept him into its grip, lifted him, and carried him clean across the rail, out into the raging seas. They heard his voice: "Don't give up hope, don't . . ."; but an unmanned boat, whirling in the vortex, struck him, and he disappeared from sight. Taylor was gone; dead.

Captain Withers took over on the shambles that had been *Royal Charter*, fought his way down to the main saloon, called to the passengers huddled there: "We're on a sandy beach, embedded in it. We're not a dozen paces from the shore and safety. The tide'll leave us dry and you'll all be safe." He returned to the deck, was caught by a wave, and swept to his death; and as he went Withers called: "May God bless you all!"

And there, ashore, watching the tragedy played out to its destined end, were two old folk; a mother and her husband who with other local folk tried forming a human chain to give aid to those stricken souls out there. In a flash, as the winds tore at their bodies like demons from

some dark underworld, father, mother, and son recognized each other . . . and within sight of the cottage that was home, Jack Lewis died.

The little church of Llanalltgo that night took the bodies of the dead, washed ashore in scores, in dozens, singly; took them and blessed them and gave them sanctuary. Of the ship's total complement, only thirty-five lived to tell the terrible tale.

For the rest of that week, the winds and seas abating, men walking along the foreshore of Moelfre Bay picked up gold for the trouble of taking it from crevices in the rocks, from out of the sand itself. The Collector of Customs, in those spacious days also the Official Receiver of Wrecks, did his frantic best to organize proper search parties, but failed. It was thought that salvage operations would be a simple affair; but the vast storm had ground *Royal Charter* so effectively, pounded her so small, that divers making repeated attempts found little of value. Indeed, a month later, not more than 137 gold ingots were recovered.

An iron-bound casket, engraved with the name of a London bank, was found among the rocks; it had been forced open and stripped of its contents. By whom? Nature? Or man? Nobody could say; or if they could, they would not tell.

A large-scale salvage attempt was made in 1906, but produced nothing. Later, in January, 1914, there was moderate success, £80,000 worth of gold being recovered. And among the items salvaged was a coffee cup bearing the name *Royal Charter*, undamaged, without even a chip in it—one of the cups Captain Taylor had seen his stewards carrying in to the passengers assembled in the main

saloon. And inside that unchipped cup they found a small, a perfect pearl. . . .

In May, 1955, Merseyside members of the British Sub-Aqua Club, among them two girl stenographers from Liverpool offices, climbed into their gear, waded deep into the seas off Moelfre Bay, and went down to all that is left of that tall wind ship; they discovered *Royal Charter*'s keel under fifteen feet of water. But they brought back no gold.

Maybe they remembered that not only yellow metal, but the broken bodies of men, women, and children still rest somewhere down there, almost within reach of the human hand. They had come home.

## 10.

### "It's No' Físh Ye're Buyín' . . ."

THE CHANCES are that there are hundreds of folk, maybe thousands, who can find excitement and to spare, and ungrudging admiration for the seamen concerned, in a story of ocean-going ships, big ships, which steamed out of port and met catastrophe; but who, given the story of an insignificant little fishing vessel, similarly overwhelmed, would raise their eyebrows and protest that the sinking of such a small vessel could by no stretch of imagination be considered as a "famous shipwreck."

It is just a matter of opinion. This is the story of a trawler, named *Jeria*, and of the drama that sometimes attends the catching of fish.

It was bitterly cold and intensely dark, that bleak morning on a Scottish railway station; as cold, one of the men claimed, "as th' heart o' an ill-favored wife," as black "as th' inside o' a black cow." All around them, as they stood there, awaiting the arrival of the milk train that would carry them to their destination, were heavy canvas sea bags, bedding, boots, mattresses, oilskins, sou'westers, blankets. And in some dim-lit corner of that station was the figure of a woman, come to see her man off.

Normally, no wife of a trawlerman leaves her home to bid farewell to her husband; superstition combined with some irrational fear of the unknown down the centuries discounts that type of leavetaking. Innumerable things can happen to fishermen to absolutely prevent them going to sea.

They say it is unlucky to bump into a red-haired person, or anyone with flat feet, or a stranger who happens to be "ill-fitted"; or, for that matter, to cross paths with a parson. They say, too, that tragedy comes to any fishing boat whose crew pick a dead body out of the seas, or who are foolhardy enough to clean fish scales from their craft before the end of the trip. But the point about this particular woman on that cold Scottish railway station on that morning was, first, that she was blonde; second, that she had been married only two days to this man to whom she was bidding farewell and whispering: "Come back soon—and safe—Bill."

Old Mattie, a man who had served the seas more years than he cared to recall, who still served them in his way as night watchman, had stoked up the fires in *Jeria* and was ready and eager to hand over as the trawlermen climbed aboard. He chuckled at them as they clapped him between the shoulders, thanked him in their own individual ways for providing them with warmth on such a perishing cold morning. And Old Mattie hobbled ashore without so much as a second look at his charge and turned his footsteps toward his cobble cottage. He had done another stint and was content, though the urge was still in his old bones to be active, among the lads, pulling his full weight out there.

*Jeria* was due to sail shortly after dawn, and a windy

dawn it would be; but the vessel was stocky, sturdy, and in her time had been an expensive ship to build, though that is the way it is with all trawlers. There was no sign of petty economies about *Jeria*, with her gleaming, solid brasswork, her mahogany fittings—though both by now were a bit battered, the worse for wear.

And then Big Joe clumped aboard, nodding cheerily to men as he passed; a broken briar jutted at a belligerent angle from the corner of his grim but good-humored mouth. Big Joe was a typical trawlerman, heavy-bodied, broad in the shoulder, wide-hipped. It would appear, with a man like Big Joe, almost a physical impossibility that he was ever anything but a full-grown man, born encased in seagoing gear. For one could hardly visualize the likes of Big Joe as a dimpled baby kicking in its bath, smiling up into the eyes of its mother. No. Big Joe, and for that matter all other trawlermen, could never have been newborn babes at any time in their lives. They just appear; and, as silently, sometimes, disappear from the sight of others.

The crew sat down to breakfast in the messroom. Cookie came in bearing a vast teapot and poured the brew into an assortment of mugs set in the table fiddleys; he returned a moment later with a great dish of hot bacon. Every man jack in that little company sat there, silent, and waited the coming to table of Big Joe before they started eating. It had always been that way, traditionally, and it always would be, sitting there to the first meal in their shore clothes, with never a word passing between them, unless or until Big Joe started a conversation, which he seldom did.

An hour later *Jeria* was just one long incessant noise;

the noise of her screw turning, beating at the seas; the noise of her engines; the myriad noises of men at work; the soft swish of water in her bilges. And, over all, that faint yet unmistakable smell of hot oil coming up from her engine room, the smell that veiled the all-pervading odor of the fish room, a compartment stretching three-fourths of *Jeria's* total length.

That night, in the threatening glare of a fiery sun, the air about them gaspingly thin and the tormented sky shot through with occasional lightning, the seas started piling themselves up, worse than Big Joe or any man among his crew had ever seen before. On deck men coiled away the warp, cleaned up generally, stowing rope, paint pots, and odd gear that would not be wanted before they got back home again. By dawn *Jeria* was doing her level best to reach some sort of compromise with a turmoil of wind and water, and not making much success of her task. Above the ship, a tearing wind carried a score of wide-winged sea birds soaring toward heaven, planing madly down until they turned sharply, missing the white-flecked combers by inches. Somebody, somewhere wanted the good food of the sea . . . and that was *Jeria's* job, and the men who served in her. Whether her catch reached the shops, and thuswise the housewives of Britain, or went to expensive restaurants, was another matter. The trawlermen have sufficient on their own plates without concerning themselves overmuch with the ultimate destination of their catches.

Much as he had tried, Bill, whose rating was bo'sun, could not forget that last farewell back on the bleak railway station; it might have been yesterday, or a month ago, or last year—anytime. Now, in his working gear,

warm-clothed, he walked out through the steel door from the alleyway, carefully closing and bolting the lower part behind him, and stepped on deck. He stopped in his stride as the wind tore into him, streaking down like knife blades into his lungs, catching his breath. Around his seaboots water sloshed to the ankles and above. He took hold of the handrail, eased himself along the engine room casing, reached the wheelhouse, took the course from the man he relieved by repeating it back, and laid hold of the spokes. It was a deuce of a life, month after month, year after year, fishing the seas. It rolled the guts out of a fellow . . . but it was a man-sized job, for all that.

From where he stood, Bill looked out along the storm-swept seas which were merging into one with the dark sky; looked clean along the length of the heaving deck, took an occasional glance at the compass above his head, then looked back again at his mates as they rigged the trawling gallows which would take the full weight of the new net *Jeria* would soon tow deep. Bill looked past the gallows gear and noticed the manner in which gulls, gannets, and kittywakes wheeled about the ship, watching the activities of these strange things of the human world, down there on the slippery, sloping deck.

When the trawl came in, those wide-winged birds would sweep in close, shrieking defiance as they snatched a morsel from among the catch. He gave the helm a shade to starboard, matching his wits against the wiles of Dame Nature.

He nodded cheerily to Big Joe as the skipper clumped into the wheelhouse; and Big Joe, leaning over, wiped Bill's steamy breath from the storm-lashed window of the house, and himself took a look at the hands rigging the



gallows. The last shackle and rope were being made fast, the trawl was nigh on ready. A dot of light on the echo sounder showed *Jeria* to be over 189 fathoms.

Big Joe made a swift mental calculation; they would need to trawl about twelve hundred yards, sending the great net dragging along the sea bed at the end of its steel cable.

He planted a leatherlike hand on the telegraph and rang down to the engine room; *Jeria* came around into the wind as Bill eased the helm. Steam coursed along her steel veins, and the double winch screamed into life. The squat little vessel shivered, protested as the net went out and down; rope markers at twenty-fathom intervals raced through sheaf blocks. Five, ten minutes, and the net was trailed.

Again Big Joe rang down to the engine room. A puff of black smoke from *Jeria's* dowdy funnel mingled with gray-black clouds and drifted away into eternity. Her screw turned slowly, white-topped graybeards parted beneath her bows, and the wide-winged birds, turning on the wind, followed in her wake protesting at this long delay before mealtime, watching every move of the ship and her crew from their beady little eyes.

So for more than three hours *Jeria* fished the good food, taking it tight-packed into her great net as she trailed it slowly across the ocean floor. The hours slipped past. In late afternoon Big Joe stumbled along the deck in the teeth of a monstrous wind, fought his way to the wheelhouse, watched the hands muster forward, rime and spume freezing on their oilskins and faces. Once again Big Joe placed a leatherlike hand on the engine-room telegraph, this time signaling "Stop." Again *Jeria* turned into

the wind, drifted. And again the double winch came to life, hauling at the steel cable, bringing the twenty-fathom markers up and over the sheaf blocks. The trawl was coming in. And the world was fast going mad.

Big Joe was peering from the windows of the house, looking out over the side at the breaking spume; the winch turned over slowly now; the last twenty-fathom marker came in sight, draped with weed, fouled with other things from under the surface. The great iron doors that kept the hungry mouth of the trawl open were now in view, going slowly to a level higher than the wheel-house, swinging inboard; two big steel balls connecting trawl footrope to headrope followed; drifting toward the stern of *Jeria* was a long line of floats, beyond this line the catch.

Foot by foot the hands brought it alongside; gulls, gannets, and kitties swept down on the wind, fighting together for a morsel, their white bodies merging with snow that had come drifting from the slate-gray skies. Water and weed dropped from the trawl, laden to overcrowding with white-bellied fish, with gray fish, with brown-tinged fish, with fish whose bodies scintillated in a thousand vague hues. Fish for the homes of housewives; for the swell restaurants; for high-priced hotels—what could it matter *who* got it?

Bill ran forward and unhitched a slipknot; the slithering cascade was released and fell, flapping, squirming, gasping with gills distended. Within moments the catch was being gutted; one swift flip, and livers fell into baskets, the gutted fish were tossed deftly into others. Below deck, the fish room became filled, the catch shelved

and packed neatly on ice. And now *Jeria* could turn about and make her way home.

But that would not be easy; not nearly so simple as it had been coming out from home, and for several reasons. First, Big Joe could not now rightly calculate *Jeria's* exact position. *Jeria's* patent log had long since been torn from her by the seas; it had become impossible long ago to take any sort of reliable bearing on his compass swaying in its gimbals. And neither Bill, nor Big Joe for all his strength, nor any other man aboard *Jeria* could hope to take her on a perfect course against existing weather conditions. That was impossible, for the wheel would now have to be fought by sheer strength and muscle as the graybeards took *Jeria* wildly in their monstrous grip.

So she stuck her nose into the seas and drove it deep and ahead, with Big Joe himself at her helm, watching her carefully as she took blow after blow, trying to hold her on course, or as near as possible to the course he had decided to take. But the seas came a-crashing. The winds howled at them.

Big Joe stuck out his chin. This looked like being a touch-and-go trip home. But times had been lean, a bit severe; there was not much ready cash in the kitty back home; not much for the womenfolk, the children. And this trip Big Joe and his crew had aimed to make profitable. . . . Back home, many of their wives, and their elder children maybe, would be trying their best to listen—though they were breaking some law laid down by the radio authorities—for the call sign of *Jeria*, this squat little craft in which was all those womenfolk held dear.

Respite? No such thing now for Big Joe and his men.

They had steamed out to the grounds, they had shot their trawl, trailed it, hauled it in, got their catch, gutted it, and stowed it on fresh ice. Now they were going to take it home in spite of the weather.

Every sixty minutes, Big Joe called up skippers of trawlers and other fisheries craft in the vicinity, exchanged weather news with them, and slipped in a word or two that he knew or hoped would be picked up by his crew's womenfolk as they sat listening, knitting maybe, praying silently to God for the safety of their men.

But Big Joe knew at last it was impossible to try pushing ahead on course; the weather had deteriorated too much for that. Best to run for shelter into, say, Patriksfjord, rest up a while there. And the night closed in.

Shortly before dawn, shore stations, trawlers, and some folk sitting in their cottages with longer-range receivers heard the call: "*Jeria* to all trawlers. *Jeria*. Being driven ashore between Stalberg Light and Redsand Bay. Require immediate assistance." And in that direction went fishermen of Britain, racing against death; for out there fellow men cried for help.

An hour passed. Then came another cry for aid. "Here is *Jeria*. *Jeria*. Hurry, hurry." But though they crammed on every ounce of steam pressure, those racing rescue ships knew they could never even hope to make it. "*Jeria*. *Jeria* here. I'm calling every trawlerman near us. Old Feathery's going to get us. We can't last another ten minutes."

Ten minutes; nine; eight; seven; six—and then: "Good-by, pals. Good-by everybody out there. Say good-by to our wives and children for us. Good-by Britain. Good-by."

They still remember that dreadful night around Britain's northern fisheries coast; they still remember how a sister trawler reached her home port; the reunion between womenfolk and their men. And of one woman, a blonde, who, heavy-eyed with weeping, watched them as they kissed and embraced each other, and then cried: "My Bill. I heard him speak to me on the radio, only once. Then I heard him and his mates and their ship die. Those that want fish, let them catch it, I say. Oh God, my Bill!"

It was Sir Walter Scott, you may remember, who once wrote: "It's no' fish ye're buyin'. *It's men's lives.*"

## II.

### *Voyage of the Mignonette*

SHE WAS a trim little craft, as trim, as sturdy as they come. She was the product of a South of England shipbuilding yard, and her builders had fashioned her to the precise orders of an Australian Queen's Counsel, a man who knew a yacht when he saw one, who spent his leisure hours away from the arid atmosphere of the law, afloat around the coast line of "Down Under."

They built her strong, put timbers into *Mignonette* capable of standing up to the toughest weather her owner could expect to meet, completed their work, took a final look at her, and reckoned she would make a comfortable voyage out to Melbourne. All she needed was a skipper and a crew who could handle her properly, and no scrimshanking.

Tom Dudley got the job as captain. His Board of Trade ticket was good. It showed Tom to be a man of exemplary character, wide experience, and courage—qualities any employer would look for when taking on a skipper to bring an expensive yacht right across the Seven Seas. After his appointment was confirmed, Dudley looked around for a likely crew. Fastidious, Tom Dud-

ley was; he wanted men he could trust to the hilt, and beyond if need be—men who could “whistle a wind” and make the best use of it.

He whittled down the applicants to two, and signed them on articles; they put their signature on the document painstakingly, carefully: Edwin Stephens, mate; Edmund Brooks, able seaman. Dudley liked the cut of their jib, these two men; and between them, he felt confident enough, they could tackle their job and make it a mighty successful trip. Then he looked around Southampton for one more hand, and discovered just the youngster he wanted in Richard Parker, up-and-coming, seventeen years of age, and as keen as they come.

Dudley visited the boy's home, saw his parents, and secured their permission to take young Dick. No, he had neither brothers nor sisters—just Dick and Mum and Dad, just the three of them—and no matter what the parents may have had in mind in the way of a job for this smiling boy of theirs, since he was knee-high to a grasshopper, Dick's father told Dudley, “That boy's never stopped talking about ‘the day I'll go to sea.’”

Skipper Tom Dudley grinned: “He'll do. Mind you, I'm not making promises about seamanship; he'll pick up a lot that'll be useful to him later on, but on this voyage his main job's in the pantry. He signs articles as cabin boy.” So Richard Parker signed . . . and spent the rest of that day proud as a peacock, doing his best to develop some sort of ocean roll in his walk. Then he packed his bag, told Mum: “I'd rather you *didn't* come down to the ship to see me off; I don't want either of us to get laughed at. I'll not be away long, mother; be home by Christmas—unless the owner likes the look of me and takes me on

permanently. If he does that, you and Dad could sell out here and come out there, couldn't you? That'd be fine, wouldn't it?"

He was gone, striding down the road of little double houses, whistling as he went his way—leaving a woman whose eyes were tear-stained, whose heart felt very empty, and a father who blurted out: "No need to cry, dear. It'll make a man of young Dick, see if it doesn't. You'll not know him when he gets back."

Out of Southampton, that bright, sunny morning of May 19, 1884, sailed the yacht *Mignonette*, her brasswork glinting in the sun, her whitework spotless. Under trimmed sails she stepped daintily into the English Channel, veered, picked up just that breath of fair wind she wanted, took it greedily, used it, and sped toward Land's End. Dudley would shape his main course immediately they sighted Finisterre. And then everybody forgot all about *Mignonette*. Everybody, that is, but Dick's Mum and Dad, Tom Dudley's wife and three children, and the wife and one son of Edwin Stephens. So far as seaman Brooks was concerned, nobody back in Southampton ate their heart out for him, for Brooks was alone in the world.

*Mignonette* called at Madeira, took aboard some fresh food, replenished her water beakers, and pulled out ready for the next long leg of the voyage. The weather was good, and looked like staying that way right down to the Cape. From there, after a couple of days ashore, Dudley knew he might expect the going to be choppy for a spell; then, clear across to Melbourne, and a job well done.

But, crossing the Line, *Mignonette* ran into bad weather; sixteen hundred miles before the Cape of Good



Hope it deteriorated to severe storm conditions. And on July 5, at dawn, a monstrous sea came at them, smashed itself against *Mignonette's* starboard quarter, and stove it in.

Within minutes that trim little craft, less than a couple of months old, became a shambles; now there was no chance that she would live much longer—an hour, maybe a little more, but no longer than that. Skipper Dudley knew there could be no hope; but they were on the regular trade routes, and with luck they would be sighted and picked up within hours.

"Stephens, and you, Brooks, look lively. There's no time to spare. Get the lifeboat clear, swing her out, get ready to lower away. We can't last much longer in this lot; another sea like that and she'll be gone. You, young Parker, lend a hand; do just what the Mate tells you. I'll get down below and see what food's handy. What's in the boat, Stephens?"

"Nothing, sir. Nothing at all."

As they cleared the lifeboat from her chocks, swung it out, and prepared to lower it away, Dudley dived below deck, and emerged a moment later as another sea came sweeping across and crashing down on the stricken yacht.

"She's done for, men. Jump for your lives!"

So they jumped, the three men and the boy. They unshipped the oars, laid hold of them, and pulled clear of the vortex that whirled around the last of *Mignonette*. They saw the last sticks of her disappear; and then, but not until then, Stephens found voice.

"You got any supplies, skipper?"

Tom Dudley's hand went into the pocket of his oilskins and produced two small round tins.

"Turnips," he said. "No time to get anything more. Just these two tins."

"Nothing to drink?"

"Nothing, Stephens. There're the lifeboat beakers."

"They're empty."

"Good heavens!"

So, with no more than two tins of turnips, for the next three days the lifeboat drifted, Dudley doling out the contents of the tins; one spoonful each twice a day until it was gone. And on the morning of the fourth day, as Dick Parker lay sleeping, murmuring in his sleep unintelligible words, Brooks yelled: "A sail! If it isn't, I'm dreaming!"

But this was no ship, no succour. This, a distance off and half-hidden by thick sea mist that had come up overnight, was a turtle . . .

"Food, that's what it is. Food!"

Brooks croaked: "And us famished. We can't lose that thing, skipper. We daren't lose it."

They pulled alongside. Dudley up-ended his oar and brought it down crashing, and they brought the creature aboard.

So on the fifth day of their ordeal, food came to them out of the cruel sea; not a great deal, but enough of it to get along with for a spell. Dudley cut it up and doled it out; it was raw, unpleasantly raw, but manna to aching bellies.

That turtle lasted them eleven days. Then the last vestige was gone; for the next eight days there was neither food nor drink. But then it rained; not much, but enough of the precious liquid to moisten their parched mouths. And as the night closed in around them and they lay down to try sleeping, Tom Dudley heard a noise; a strange noise

this, like something crawling slowly along the boat, dragging something metallic. He sat up and peered into the darkness.

"What the dickens are you up to, youngster?"

Richard Parker turned toward him and stuck out his tongue. It was twice the normal size. He mouthed his reply. "I . . . got . . . to . . . drink . . . sir. I . . . got . . . to . . ."

He lifted the emptied turnip tin, lifted it wearily, raised one arm toward the gunnel, heaved his aching body after it, and cried out in triumph, "Water. See? *Water!*"

"You can't do that, youngster. Can't drink that stuff. Why, it'd kill you! You'll——"

And then the night sky was split apart by a vivid streak of lightning; back of the flash, thunder roared and echoed. Brooks let out a croaking cry.

"It's going to rain! Rain . . . rain . . . a deluge of it. Please, God above, let it rain as it's never done before. I'd sell my soul to the devil for just a few blessed drops of it. Just . . . a few . . . drops."

It rained, though not a great deal; and as it fell from the heavens, they caught it eagerly in their tattered oilskins and drank the drops they caught. It eased those acrid throats a little, but not for long; and when they fell asleep and lay there motionless, Dick Parker picked up his turnip tin, lifted it, filled it to the brim, and drank deep—of salt water. By dawn he lay in the boat's bottom, moaning in twisting agony. And as a pitiless sun climbed high to beat down on them, Tom Dudley did his best to talk sanely.

"We've got to face up to it, men. We're dying. No food. Nothing to drink. No sign of help from a ship any-

where. It was our last hope, on the steamship lanes, but we must've drifted right off the regular tracks. The last hope. Now it's gone . . ."

Stephens winced: "Hope can't go; it *can't*, I tell you. I got a wife and youngster. They don't know how we're fixed. I got to see them both again. I just *got to*!"

"Me, I've three children, and my wife," Dudley told him. "With the Almighty's help, I've fended for them so far, and I've got to go on fending that way. There's no one else they can look to. The four of them depend on me. We've got to live, somehow. Got to."

"You tell me how we can, then."

"There's a chance, a last chance."

"For Pete's sake, what is it?"

"To save . . . the rest—one of us must . . . die."

Brooks raised his body: "That kid, there. Cruel to see a kid like him suffer."

"Crueler for my kid if he starves because I die," retorted Stephens. "What'll happen to him, to his mother? Tell me that if you can, Brooks. You've got nobody to worry about. Nobody."

Said Skipper Dudley: "Stop talking, the two of you. God alone can help us now. One of us must die, if the others are to live."

For a moment there was silence, the silence of the grave; even the seas ceased lapping around the boat and were stilled.

"Stephens, and you, Brooks, we've got to do it. For heaven's sake, the two of you, don't stare at me like that; don't be cowards. Think of your wife and child, Stephens. Think of mine too, if you can. You, Brooks, you've got nobody; nor has the boy over there."

Tom Dudley unsheathed a long knife, started to ease his body slowly along the lifeboat.

"Oh, God," he prayed as he moved, "oh, God, forgive us for what I am about to do, for this act that our souls might be saved."

Brooks slithered flat on his aching belly, did his best to reach Dudley, cried out: "I can't, blast you. Can't move. Too weak now. Can't reach you, Dudley, or I'd stop you doing that. Stop you, d'you hear. You—can't—do—it!" On a scream, his voice broke, cackling away into nothing as Tom Dudley found voice: "Rouse up, young Parker. Your . . . your time has . . . come."

Two days later the German freighter *Montezuma*, homeward bound from African ports, sighted the *Mignonette's* broken lifeboat, came alongside, lowered a boat of her own, and picked them out of the seas. Tom Dudley, Stephens, Brooks—just the three of them, half-crazed, stupefied, mumbling infernal, unintelligible things. She proceeded on her way, to bring them into Falmouth Harbour. They had been precisely twenty-four days adrift.

In the office of Her Majesty's Receiver of Wrecks and Customs, at Falmouth, early in the morning of September 6, 1884, a clerk pushed his head around a half-opened door and looked inquiringly at the three strangers standing there.

"We've just been rowed ashore from the German ship *Montezuma*; we'd like to talk with the Receiver of Wrecks."

A moment later Robert Gandy Cheeseman, Her Majesty's Collector of Customs for the West Cornwall District and Official Receiver of Wrecks, sat at his desk, pre-

pared to listen to anything his three visitors might have to tell him. And Captain Thomas Dudley, Master-under-God of the yacht *Mignonette*, acted as spokesman. The statement he made, on oath, was so extraordinary, so blood-chilling, so monstrous that Cheeseman touched the bell on his desk, called his clerk, and gave him a slip of paper on which he had written a few words. Ten minutes later into the office stepped Sergeant James Lavery, of Falmouth Harbour Police. Lavery had worked fast.

"You're Thomas Dudley, master of the yacht *Mignonette*? Your companions are Edwin Stephens and Edmund Brooks?"

The three gaunt men nodded but said no word.

"I have a warrant for your arrest, the three of you; you will come with me and be charged, on your own statement to the Collector of Customs, with the murder at sea of one Richard Parker, formerly cabin boy in the *Mignonette*. It is my duty to warn you all that you need say no more at this time to add to what you have stated already."

And so at Falmouth Police Court, before the mayor and other magistrates, Dudley, Stephens, and Brooks were charged, on remand, that they, "survivors from the 19-ton yacht *Mignonette*, on passage from Southampton to Melbourne, Australia, did wilfully murder on the High Seas on July 20, 1884, Richard Parker, seventeen years of age, cabin-boy."

For the prosecution appeared Mr. W. O. J. Danckwerts, Junior Treasury Counsel, assisted by Mr. G. Appleby Jenkins, Town Clerk of Penrhyn, instructed by the Solicitor to the Treasury; defending the accused was Mr. Harry Tilly, solicitor, of Falmouth. Cheeseman was first

to give evidence, telling the court exactly what had happened after the German freighter *Montezuma* reached Falmouth Harbour on September 6. He told the Court that the statement Dudley made to him had been submitted that same day to the Board of Trade, London; that he had communicated with Sergeant Laverty; that as a result of the information he had laid with the police, Laverty secured an arrest warrant and took the three accused into custody.

Danckwerts told the Court that the sworn statement of Dudley was in his possession, and that, with permission of the magistrates, he intended to read it in full. To this Tilly objected, submitting that the statement had been taken in fact under the Merchant Shipping Act; that it was intended only for the purpose of Board of Trade inquiries into wrecks; and that it was not therefore admissible in criminal proceedings. But the magistrates overruled the objection and ordered Danckwerts to proceed with the reading of the affidavit of Dudley.

"The charge," said Danckwerts, "is a very grave one; the circumstances are very painful because there is no human being who can help feeling the most profound pity for men who found themselves in such a strait that they felt justified in taking the life of a fellow creature. There are some cases in which the law warrants one taking the life of a fellow creature. The three prisoners say they were justified in acting as they did, but I venture to submit that this was, in fact, not one of those cases which the law of England warrants. The facts are few, and beyond dispute. . . ."

And so, as the hours went past, Danckwerts read the statement. There was, he said, no option for the Court

but to commit Dudley and Stephens for trial; but in the case of Brooks, having carefully considered the position, the prosecution felt he must be acquitted and no evidence would therefore be placed against him. Danckwerts asked the Court to discharge Brooks, but added that the prosecution would call upon him later to give evidence. Dudley and Stephens were committed to stand trial at the following winter assizes for the County of Cornwall. And as the Court rose that evening, someone cried: "Wait? Hang them now!" Someone else called: "For heaven's sake, no. Let them go free. They've suffered already, more than enough." Dudley and Stephens were granted bail.

The hearing had lasted little more than six hours, and was reported in full in *The Times*, September 19. A spate of letters followed, some reviling Dudley and Stephens, some in their favor. Those letters poured in to the newspaper offices from all parts of Britain. Two months later, on November 3, at Exeter Assizes, Justice Huddleston charged a grand jury, giving them a detailed account of the whole tragedy:

I must tell you, members of the grand jury, what I consider to be the law as applicable to this case. It is a matter that has undergone considerable discussion, and it has been said that it comes within a class of cases where the killing of another on the ground of necessity may be excusable. I can find no authority for that proposition in the recognized treatises on criminal law.

There is an American case, of March, 1842, which recorded that sailors threw passengers overboard to lighten a ship's lifeboat, and it was held that the sailors ought to have been thrown overboard first, unless they were re-



quired to work that lifeboat. But I cannot subscribe to the authority of that case. Another illustration, mentioned by Lord Bacon in his *Elements of the Law*, and which is sometimes quoted as the ground of the doctrine of necessity, is—where two persons being shipwrecked and getting on the same raft, but finding it not able to save them both, one of them thrusts the other from it, whereby he is drowned; he who thus preserves his life at the expense of another man's is excusable from unavoidable necessity, and from the principle of self-defence, since their both remaining on the same weak raft is a mutual though innocent attempt upon and endangering of each other's life.

It may be said that the selection of the boy, Richard Parker, as indeed Dudley seems to have said on oath, was better, because his stake in society, having no children, was less than theirs; and it has been urged that the state of the boy's health, which is alleged to have been failing, in consequence of his drinking sea water, would justify the act. If you should feel yourselves bound to find a true bill, I shall then take care that the matter be placed in a form for further consideration.

The grand jury did in fact return a true bill for willful murder against Dudley and Stephens; but when the prosecution had argued their case, and the defense had argued theirs, a perplexed jury returned and told the judge: "Whether the prisoners were and are guilty of murder, my Lord, the jury are ignorant, and beg leave to refer the matter to the Court."

"Foreman of the Grand Jury," Huddleston told them, "you profess with your companions to be unable to give a verdict from ignorance of the law. It is not for the Court to put forward criticism of your attitude, nor to agree with your ignorance; nor, indeed, to disagree with it. But

you have said your say, and the Court finds that the Grand Jury cannot therefore be expected to give any finding of their own, and rules that the two prisoners be liberated, on bail, themselves in one hundred pounds and one surety for each in a like amount, to appear at the Assize for Cornwall next, after a decision of the Queen's Bench, if that Court consider the crime of murder has been committed. The record will be drawn up, and the Crown will apply for a writ of certiorari, to remove it to the Queen's Bench Division, when it will be argued as a Crown motion."

Thus a Queen's Bench special Divisional Court, constituted of five senior judges, together with the Attorney General, the Lord Chief Justice, and others, next argued the case: that the two prisoners did on the high seas, within the jurisdiction of the Admiralty of England, which by statute was now transferred to the Courts of Assize, feloniously kill and murder one Richard Parker.

Examples of precedent were carefully examined, and one by one rejected by the judges. At the end of nearly four hours the Court retired for consideration, and on their return Lord Coleridge spoke: "We are all agreed that the two prisoners must be convicted; in the meantime, however, we wish to know, Mr. Attorney General, what course you propose to pursue."

"My Lords, I conceive that your Lordships must proceed to give judgment and pronounce sentence."

Justice Denman asked: "Is that according to the practice?"

"Certainly. There are precedents for it."

"Are there none the other way?" asked Lord Coleridge. "That is, no instances of the case being sent back to the Assize?"

"None that we are aware of."

So once again a panel of learned judges retired to consider the merits as argued; this time, however, it was obvious that their verdict was unanimous. That the prisoners were in fact guilty of murder, that sentence be passed upon them: but that in such a rare instance, for which no legal precedent had been or could be produced, how should sentence be passed, and whether such sentence might be postponed for a limited period, but only for a limited period. For it seemed that the final verdict, already decided upon by the Queen's Bench, and thus the obvious one—death by hanging—*must* be given.

Justice Denman asked: "Can the Court, then, pass sentence within four days?"

The Attorney General told him: "I do not object to such postponement of sentence."

But: "By the Criminal Law Act," protested Justice Grove, "the Court is now to pass sentence, *not saying when!*"

The Attorney General explained: "It is understood that your Lordships give judgment against the prisoners. I have to ask therefore what directions you give as to their custody?"

Lord Coleridge nodded: "They must remain in the custody of this Court; they will be removed to and detained in Holloway Gaol."

Four days later, at the end of the period permitted during the Queen's Bench consideration of the case, Dudley and Stephens were sentenced to death by hanging. They were treated at Holloway as "first-class misdemeanants," were permitted to exercise in the prison grounds together, to see relatives and friends, and to have such luxuries in

the shape of food as "might be purchased for or brought in to them."

On the afternoon of Friday, December 13, 1884, as superstitious, as ominous a day and date as any sailorman might dread or fear in combination, a hansom cab clattered up to the jail gates and stopped. A warder stepped forward.

"There'll be no alcoholic spirits in that parcel for your husband, ma'am?"

"No. Nothing of that kind. Just a few homemade cakes. My man's always taken some of them away whenever he went to sea. He said——" but welling tears broke the voice of Dudley's wife.

"There, there, ma'am. Don't you take on so; he'll be right glad to see you. You just step right up to the governor's office. They'll see you right there, ma'am." The warder spoke over his shoulder: "I don't envy that poor soul, Joe. It doesn't seem as if that husband of hers'll have much to say to her. Time's getting short for him and for his mate."

"Too true. Those two've only got a few more hours to go. Just a few more."

And so she sat facing him, a woman who did her best to blink back the scalding tears; she spoke to her man. She said: "Your kind of cakes, Tom. Raisins and currants and——" but she could speak no more. She choked and turned away from his gaze.

"Living nightmare, dear. That and no more. Today, tonight, tomorrow, the next night—and then——"

"Tom, my dear. Tom. It's Saturday, tomorrow; there's so much, so very much can happen before . . . before . . . Monday morning. I've prayed so hard. I'll keep on

praying. I'll come early tomorrow, as early as they'll let me."

So she left the grim gates of Holloway Gaol and went back to her home in the Surrey countryside, scarcely knowing what she did. That night she walked the floor of their bedroom, counting each second as it ticked away on the old grandfather clock down in the living room. At dawn she prepared herself for the journey back to the prison; she was packing a few things for Tom when, around nine o'clock, along the street someone came whistling. And then that same someone pushed open the gate to the little house, walked the few steps to the front door, rapped on it, and started to whistle once more.

She opened the door and almost in a trance took the telegram handed to her by a grinning messenger boy.

"'Mornin', Mrs. Dudley, ma'am. Mebbe there's an answer? I'll wait while you read the message."

She tore open the envelope. Her fingers were palsied.

"You gone as white as a sheet, ma'am. Eh . . . steady, steady there. You ain't gonna faint. Course you ain't, for I don't know what to do when women faint on me, honest I don't. Lemme come in an' help you. You jes' sit there an' I'll get you a glass o' water, ma'am. Fair gave me a fright, you did."

"Bless you, son. It's not that I feel sick; not that. This is from the governor. It's about my Tom. They've—they've—the Queen's granted him her pardon."

And then the tears came, unquenched, flooding.

"An' you're cryin' because it's good news! Funny, ain't it, how women cry that way?"

He was gone, whistling as he had come.

In its edition of December 15, 1884, *The Times*

noted: "The news, Mrs. Dudley stated, that her husband was to serve a sentence of six months without hard labour came as a blessed joy and relief, and, at the same time, as a somewhat painful surprise, for she had felt all along that the two men would never be hanged, and that their trial would have ended with immediate release." But life is like that. The reaction can never be anticipated. Steps were taken in influential quarters for the immediate release of Dudley and Stephens, and what had been one of the most remarkable stories ever told at a trial came to an end with one of the most extraordinary verdicts in British criminal records.

And in a corner in a quiet little graveyard in Southampton, a headstone records these simple words: "Sacred to the Memory of Richard Parker." Just that, but no more. An empty grave, it is.

# 12.

## Seventeen Hundred Miles in a Lifeboat

THERE ARE certain cargoes seafaring men detest and respect with everything that is in the human mind and body—cargoes which at times become a mild, then a severe headache to all hands, cargoes which have been known to sink the ship carrying them. Prize headaches of vast magnitude.

Grain is one. Grain, whether it is good, bad, or indifferent, can get wet. When it gets wet it overwhelms a ship with an appalling smell, and, if it ended there, it would make the remainder of the trip nothing to be desired. But wet grain swells, and when it swells sufficiently, it can open the seams of a ship and sink her.

Zinc concentrates are another such cargo. Heavy, gray, dustlike stuff, zinc concentrates; so heavy that when the holds of a freighter seem only half filled, nevertheless she is carrying her full load. And that happened to the *Trevessa*, of the Hain Steamship Company.

*Trevessa* was a well-found vessel, a German, taken over after World War I among other reparations ships and sold

by the British Government to her owners. She pulled out of the Liverpool River on January 2, 1923, in ballast, bound for Canadian ports; the North Atlantic crossing was by no means comfortable, but *Trevessa* weathered it well, loaded a mixed freight in Canadian and United States ports, headed out for Panama, Australia, and New Zealand ports, discharged the last of her American freight, and steamed into Port Pirie, South Australia. And there *Trevessa* opened her holds and took aboard a load of zinc concentrates—a “sticky” cargo which, by lying low in cargo compartments, in bad weather can shift and throw a ship in all directions. It is just another of those bad headaches seamen hope to avoid but which, as often as not, have an uncanny habit of catching up with them, no matter what opinions may be.

At Freemantle, *Trevessa* bunkered, and on May 25, 1923, she pulled out, homeward bound. Everything aboard was “shipshape and Bristol fashion,” right down to her radio room, which was still equipped with her original gear, a German half-kilowatt Telefunken QG apparatus with a galena crystal receiver. Her wireless operator was keen-eyed, square-jawed Donald Lamont, a man who knew his job to the last spark. Aboard were a crew of forty-four souls; the officers, bo’suns and able seamen were British, the remainder East Indian and Arab seamen.

For nine days the trip was totally uneventful. Heading for Cape Town, *Trevessa* made good progress in weather that was kind and had forgotten, it seemed, how to be turbulent. But shortly after midnight on Monday, June 4, the weather broke, with that kind of swift, overwhelming break known—and dreaded—to all seamen



who ever made the trip between Australian ports and the Cape. *Trevesa* was low in the water with her heavy cargo, and in these conditions took it badly; one long, continuous, laboring strain on every seam, every rivet in her stout German body.

She steamed on, fighting back at the wet demon snatching at her sides. Then she quit, gave up the one-sided battle, mortally injured when seams opened in the shell plating to port or starboard or both. Nobody ever was quite certain.

She was now between fifteen hundred and sixteen hundred miles out, away from the nearest land. At one o'clock that fateful morning, June 4, her first officer pushed upon the door of radio operator Lamont's room, roused him from a cat nap, and told him: "She's on her way down, rapidly."

Lamont, half-dressed for his all-too-short off-watch spell, dropped from his sleeping berth, shoved on a pair of slippers, moved over to his Telefunken equipment, and tested the motor. He glanced at the clock on the bulkhead above his gear and realized that at this hour the chances of getting replies were grim, so far as "one-man" radio ships were concerned. Not for another sixty minutes, around two o'clock, would the air quicken to life; and before Lamont climbed into his bunk to doze, there had been few if any signals from ships anywhere in the vicinity. *Trevesa* had been eased down for the past forty-odd hours, as the weather roughened, and it was well; for she took a pounding more than once, half-seas under with great green mountains of water climbing aboard and hiding the deckwork from sight.

At his transmitter, Lamont sent the call: "SOS de GCVJ ss *Trevessa* lat 28.45S long 85.42E sinking rapidly crew taking to boats."

An appalling din outside the radio room made it nearly impossible for Lamont to hear anything coming from the maddened air. Giant seas were pounding at the ship, winds roared with the sound of thunder, and against such a background seamen were preparing to launch her lifeboats.

He placed both hands over his earphones and held them close to his head—so close that they began hurting bones and flesh; he searched the air for some sort of reply; time and time again he repeated the call for assistance. But no answer.

A seaman shoved open the door, poked his head in the radio room, and asked: "Any answers yet?" But Lamont shook his head. Nothing; not a thing save a few stray noises that could be anything. Ten minutes later the door opened again; someone pushed a hot drink toward the radio operator, and maintained a precarious balance while he said: "Number One hold's flooded, old man, it's coming in too fast for the pumps to kick it out again where it belongs."

Five minutes later Captain Cecil Foster looked in on Lamont for news and requested him to pass word immediately he heard anything from any other vessels. Outside, as the captain closed the door, noise was lessening; boats had been lowered and *Trevessa's* engines rung down for the last time, and the ship lay rolling in the long, hungry seas that came at her. Then an integral part of the Telefunken gear broke off and Lamont held the broken part in place with his free hand, kept on repeating the distress signal, listened, listened . . . until, nearly an

hour later, a faint signal came through. Lamont reckoned whoever it was was using a one-and-a-half-kilowatt set. Tensed, he listened—and heard the ship's call sign: "MWC." That was the White Star *Runic*.

He repeated his original call and again received acknowledgment from *Runic*. He pulled on a heavy coat, opened the door of his room, and stepped out into total darkness, for the dynamoes were stopped and gave no light. He groped his way along deck toward the direction of *Trevessa's* bridge, bumped into a dim figure, an apprentice, and told him: "Get this message to Captain Foster as fast as you can." He returned to his transmitter, clamped the 'phones to his ears, tried to recall *Runic*, but failed. Somewhere out there, whispering faintly as if they were a million miles away, somewhere two other ships called *Travessa*, but their signals were weak, too weak to be of any real help. Still . . . they were there; they might be coming nearer *Trevessa's* position hour by hour, minute by minute. Lamont reckoned he would repeat his call for the last time, did so, and received faint acknowledgment from the two unknown vessels; he could not make out their call signs in the welter of noise from the weather outside.

The door of his room opened and an officer called to him: "You'll have to quit, old man. Time to get to your boat station." The Marconi man made a last call: "Abandoning ship"; followed the officer on deck, stuffing tobacco pouch, pipe, and one or two other treasured possessions into the pockets of his heavy coat; swung down a rope into the lifeboat; landed square among a huddled group of Indians and Arabs; and sat there until Foster lowered himself, the last to leave.

"Cut her clear, carpenter," ordered Foster, and Chips did just that. The lifeboat moved away into the darkness, the chief engineer and Lamont sharing one of the long, heavy sweeps, trying their best with the other oarsmen to hold the boat safe against the long seas, the troughs, the mountains of water, that swept across their path.

In that boat, Number 1, were twenty seamen all told, Foster in charge; and they rested their oars as wind and swell carried the craft rapidly from the stricken, sinking *Trevessa*, shipped them, and cast their sea anchor, one steering oar steadying them aft. They were still drifting. In the second lifeboat were twenty-four men under First Officer J. C. Stewart Smith. As the two craft eased away from the scene of tragedy, all hands could just make out *Trevessa*, down by the head. Then she was gone forever.

In the darkness Foster spoke to Lamont, asking: "What vessels apart from *Runic* answered your call; did you get a chance of ascertaining their position at all?" Lamont told him; they knew, then, that the chances of contact within hours was slight, almost hopeless. *Runic* and the two other unknown vessels would be a long, long way away. Astern of the two lifeboats, more than sixteen hundred miles, lay the coast line of Western Australia; ahead, nearly two thousand miles ahead, the islands of Reunion, Rodriguez, Mauritius, and Madagascar. Two thousand miles . . .

Shortly after dawn everyone in the boats was violently seasick; at noon Foster and Stewart Smith took sights. Lifeboat Number 1, they reckoned, with the estimated drift during the night hours, was somewhere around forty miles nor'east of the sunken *Trevessa*. All hands were in

poor shape, quite unable to work the boat for some hours, so they lay to until nightfall, then hoisted sail, deciding to try beating into the westward.

The mast broke. Stewart Smith's craft came alongside and took Number 1 in tow; but the strain was too great in seas such as those. They quit and lay to for the rest of that night. At dawn, temporary repairs done to the fractured mast, they hoisted their sailcloth once more, this time with more favorable result. Number 1 veered away, outsailing Stewart Smith's craft, so that Foster was forced continually to tack, to shorten sail so that the two boats might remain together. It was moderately easy by day, but at night they could maintain contact only with the use of flashlights.

Foster made his decision. The course he would take meant that, at this period of the year, prevailing westerlies would prove favorable; they were likely, too, to run into the rains, which would help their water supplies; finally, the temperatures would be less trying. So the two boats sailed for six days, and on the sixth parted company. They had proved by now that too much time was being lost trying to keep contact, especially by night; they reckoned that by parting each boat stood a better chance of sighting some rescue vessel, being picked up, and taking their rescuers to the other lifeboat.

They posted double lookouts, searching the horizon for the faint sign of a smoke wisp; their hopes were high that first week, but day by day, and as night followed night, those hopes ebbed and neared vanishing point. They were steering a course Foster hoped would at last take them to Rodriguez, nearly 350 miles east of Mauritius; they had neither chronometer nor log to check position,

but, with their sextant, they kept record of latitude. So they went into the nor'west—hoping and praying, silently, as men will do times like that, with no one saying much aloud.

They headed into stiller, milder weather, then into dead calm; it meant an end to continually soddened clothing, but it meant too a sun that climbed early in the day and high in the heavens, and there beat down on them, and parched their dry throats until they prayed once more—this time for the coming of those sou'easterly trades. That would be a little better; not much, but a little. Meantime, they doled out rations to all hands—one-third of a cigarette tin of water a day, and a couple of cigarette-tin lids of condensed milk, and one ship's biscuit; and drops of rain water every time a likely squall came up let the manna fall. In that lifeboat were plenty of cigarettes, but a man cannot enjoy a smoke when his tongue and his lips are swelling through lack of saliva. So nobody smoked. Long after they were rescued, Lamont said: "We tried to sleep, or slept, and when we could we dreamed of home, of mountain springs, of long, ice-cold fruit drinks . . . and then we woke up and looked out on nothing."

They fetched up with those sou'east trades, with heavy winds and rising seas; it was hard going, but it was at least a change to what they had been enduring. It meant an end to flat calm; it meant bowling along under their canvas once again, even though rising winds and seas forced them at last to shorten sail and sometimes to ride hove to, with the agony of tattered sailcloth above and the frenzy of locked oars acting as some sort of sea anchor. But they went on.

And then . . . and then one of them died, the first of

eight deaths during that nightmare voyage. In the bleak light of day that dull, stormy morning, they laid hold of his broken, half-starved body and reverently consigned it to the depths. Twenty-four hours later another man died, and they carried out the simple ceremony all over again. After twenty-two days, nineteen hours, Chips stood up, as erect as his unsteady legs would bear him, and cried: "There's land!"

There was, too. It was Rodriguez. They had covered 1,556 miles. They staggered ashore, all in, mentally and physically, but they were on dry land. That was all that mattered. The second lifeboat fetched up on Mauritius, having covered a distance of 1,747 miles, all told.

And out there, out at sea, more than seven days earlier the searching rescue ships had given up, gone on their way, written off the *Trevessa* and her forty-four men as "missing at sea."

Captain Foster's subsequent official report contained these words: "If I had known that I was going to be called upon to make this lifeboat voyage, I could not have chosen a better crew for the purpose . . . I could not have had more loyal support; and I am proud to count them all as my friends."

Such was this odyssey of the Seven Seas; and on the Bel Ombre Jetty, Mauritius, there stands a memorial to the courage, the guts, the endurance of men who set out to do just another job of work and met utter catastrophe.

# 13.

## *No Island Better Named*

SHE WAS a trim little craft, the 48-ton schooner *Daphne*, pride of her owner, bluff, bearded Captain Wallace, a man who had spent the best part of his life defying the seas, coming out top every time Dame Nature took a vicious poke at him. And this was March 25; the year 1870.

On as bright a morning as seamen might wish for, *Daphne* stood out to sea from Invercargill, on New Zealand's South Island, and set course for the string of small islands to the south. Wallace studied the charts spread before him; they showed the Campbells, the Macquaries, the Antipodes, dozens more—most of them mere specks not worth worrying about, deserted by all save occasional sailormen who traded around New Zealand, Australia, and once in a while right across to Cape Horn. And those tough seamen had given a few of these mere spots on those charts the craziest names.

Captain Wallace planted a square-tipped thumb squarely on the chart, grunted, nodded approval, and spoke to the youngster who looked over his broad, blue-reefered shoulders.



"Reckon this'd be the place, m'lad? Like as not, your treasure'll be somewhere around *here*—" and he emphasized his opinion with a jab of his finger. "What say you, David?"

"That'd be it, captain. Big, tall headlands around there, monstrous things; and deep caves, and vicious currents that took a hold of our vessel and carried it right in, stern on, until she was wedged tight. We couldn't move her; we could do nothing. She broke up there, and that was the last of her. It was terrible, I tell you. I'll never forget those few days—never."

"Mebbe you'll not, youngster. But I'll take my oath the memories'll be a lot sweeter after we lay our hands on the gold she carried. Just you mark my words, m'lad; a lot sweeter!"

David Ashworth, onetime passenger in the sailing ship *General Grant*, bound for English ports from Melbourne, could not be certain his bearded host was right; for when a fellow has stepped aboard a ship, homeward bound, settled himself with his fellow passengers comfortably down to what should be a moderately pleasant trip, found himself caught up in vivid drama, watched the 1,200-ton ship wedged in a strange cavern like a rat in a trap and ground to pieces, watched his companions die without being able to lend a hand to any one of them, and, with nine others, lived to tell the story—nobody, he reckoned, could rightly say memories could ever be anything but bleak, grim, fantastic nightmares.

And on the voyage of the little 48-ton schooner, as Wallace took her on toward that insignificant island where tragedy, stark and hideous, had struck, David Ash-

worth sat at night and recounted to his seven shipmates the story of the *General Grant*.

It was on May 4, 1866, he told them, that the ship, under Captain Loughlin, pulled out for the London River, as happy a vessel and as cheerful a bunch of passengers as you would wish to see. Under hatches she carried a cargo of wool and hides—and gold; in passengers' baggage, too, there was an unknown amount of gold, snatched from the hoard Nature had cached away so long under Australian soil. What exact quantity of the precious stuff was among *General Grant's* cargo nobody could rightly say; but Loughlin's manifest clearly stated 2,576 ounces.

Loughlin had been cagey about that point. When somebody asked him before his ship left Melbourne: "Just how much of the stuff are you carrying, Captain?" Loughlin had lowered an eyelid knowingly, poked his questioner in the ribs, and replied: "Never you mind, mister. It ain't your affair, anyway. There's a consignment below hatches clearly labeled 'spelter' . . . and if spelter happens to look like gold, it ain't my business either. All I've got to do is take that stuff to the London River and there hand it over to an agent. They're paying me well for my trouble, and I'm not asking awkward questions, see?"

Then he went among his sixty-eight passengers, chatted with them, noted—not without some amazement—that their baggage appeared to be unduly heavy, and took a rough guess as to the precise major contents. Then he remembered that his owners, anyway, had seemed to place a mighty high value on the hides and wool and the "spelter" stowed below deck, for he himself had seen the insurance policy, whose value, cargo alone, was put at

£165,000; and that, Loughlin assured himself, was real money in anybody's currency.

For nine days *General Grant* maintained her course under blue skies; a following sea helped the winds that prevailed, and the going was easy. But on the night of May 13 the winds fell away to calm, then flat calm; yet the currents kept hold of her and shoved her along as if she were being propelled by the hands of some unseen giant. Those passengers who were taking a stroll around deck before turning in told each other it was a strange experience, for, above their heads, the expanse of sail hung limp and lifeless, yet the ship sped on. Then, one by one, they went below, undressed, climbed into their berths, and settled themselves down for the night.

An hour later the lookout, high in the ship's superstructure, yelled his warning: "Land-o! Land right ahead. *And there ain't a minute t' lose!*"

In two strides Loughlin was out of his room and into the wheelhouse. Land? What on earth had gone wrong? There was no land here; not on the course he had set.

"Up with her helm, bo'sun. Up with it. Up . . . up!"

"She ain't answerin', Captain, sir."

Loughlin nudged the man away, took the spokes himself, and exerted every ounce of strength to turn his ship.

"Take a hold, you. Lend a hand, help me ease her. Good lord, man, there's land dead ahead!"

So, for a full ninety minutes, they fought those seas like men possessed to hold *General Grant* from the course *she*, not her master, had chosen; fought with everything that was in them to keep her from killing herself and every soul who rode in her across this maniacal sea. But she

defied them. She went her way toward the island, seemed to gather speed as she went, and crashed the tall headlands with shattering impact. She shivered, appeared to gather her wits, plunged ahead once more, ground her bows hard and fast into that vague outline of rock, and came to a dead stop.

A dozen passengers, men and women, came running, dazed, sleep still heavy upon them, mouthing questions, clustering around Loughlin and his officers.

"We've struck," one of the mates tried to tell them. "She's gone head on into a cliff face. No need to panic, though. Take a grip on yourselves and leave it to us; we'll soon be out of this."

Soon? Somewhere a man cursed: "Clever, ain't yuh? Be outa this lot? Don't hand us that kinda talk, mister. Soon? Look at 'er now! Watch, I tellya."

*General Grant* had gone mad; she had swung around and was gathering way, stern first, going away from the sheer cliff she had first struck, running toward another jagged monster reared in her path. She went crashing, crunching, grinding into it, with the sound of splintering timber to mark the passage she was taking. Loughlin raced back to the helmsman.

"Turn that wheel! Turn it, I say!" But the bosun looked dimly into Loughlin's face, opened his mouth, tried to say something, failed, and collapsed, moaning, like a pricked balloon. The spokes that he had held, wrenched from his grasping fingers, had been forced against and into his chest, crushing ribs, flesh, and lungs.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, *General Grant* eased herself off the ragged headland, slipped back into deeper water, swung around in a full circle, and felt the clutch of

the current below her. Then she headed away into a darkened pit, shattered bows first. Nothing Loughlin could do would stop her progress. Into a vast hole she went, sheer rock on either side of her, masts, rigging, and sail-cloth tearing away, falling about panic-stricken men and women racing to reach her stern and screaming as they ran. And *General Grant* went her way, deep, deeper yet into the towering gloom, until she penetrated it a full quarter-mile—driving on inexorably, disdaining these mere humans who would save her from destruction. Then she stopped.

She had defied them all, gone her way as she intended, brought them into what might well have been a corner of the dark underworld itself, a place without light, with water falling down those dark, sheer sides. Now they could try sorting things out for themselves, the lot of them.

Loughlin grabbed a ship's lantern, climbed sternward along the broken deck, and reached the huddled group of fear-crazed passengers.

"You can remain where you are," he told them, "or get back to your rooms. From what I can see of our surroundings, it's impossible for the ship to move in any direction. It's an ugly situation, but I can see no immediate danger. Above us there's dry land, and at dawn I intend launching the boats and taking all of us out of the ship, out of this cave. So maybe you'd like first to gather together your possessions; then you can wait where you please for the first signs of daybreak."

Shortly after dawn, the first boat put off, with three seamen aboard and with ropes and tackle to haul the remaining lifeboats out. It was followed by a second boat,

under the command of the second mate, with three seamen and one passenger. And as the two boats disappeared from the cave, a falling tide drifted the stricken ship still farther into the darkness ahead until her main deckhouse was crushed against the dripping rock walls, stanchions torn out of their beds, deck planking itself twisted and torn until the hull, unable to withstand the pressure, sprung at the seams and seas filtered into the holds. She settled, comfortably as it were her own choice, lower into the water; then her deck was awash, and as she went men and women, treasured bundles clutched to their aching bodies, climbed the broken rail and stepped into the dark waters.

Loughlin ordered the long boat away, stood by as forty of his passengers and crew climbed aboard, ordered it away, yelled to the second lifeboat to return and make fast to the longboat. And even as he called his orders, a sea, building itself up as it came, entered the cave mouth, crashed against the boats, swamped them, smothered and drew them under, then went on and snatched at the *General Grant*, swamping her too, breaking her up, swallowing her to the last stick.

Out of that welter of destruction emerged three pitiable figures: seamen Bill Singuily and Aaron Hayman, and David Ashworth. The three of them called encouragement to each other, struck out, fought the swell, and battled their way toward daylight. Behind them they left nothing but broken timber and dead bodies.

Out there, the sun warming their torn bodies, Ashworth, Singuily, and Hayman swam around, found the two boats that had got clear, and climbed wearily aboard.

Their wounds tended, they huddled in the stern sheets, listening to the voice of the first mate.

"There's no chance," he told them, "of our landing here; there's not a foothold nor a handhold anywhere up these cliffs. They're sheer; you can see that for yourselves. I don't know this area too well, but, so far as I can remember, there's an island not more than a dozen miles off our position. With steady work at the oars we should make it by nightfall; we've all day ahead of us, and the seas have lost much of their weight. We'll divide into watches, take turn and turn about; there's some food in the lockers——"

"Yuh? An' what d'ye expect us to get at it with?" challenged a seaman. "Ain't got no can-openers, an' th' on'y food 'ere, Mister, is tins o' soup!"

"I'd log you for disrespect if we were still aboard."

"But we ain't, Mister. We're 'ere, th' lot of us, an' it's each man f'r 'isself. All I'm tellin' yuh is we ain't got no way t' open them cans o' grub, see?"

The wind came up; they rigged sails, caught a slant of it, sailed away with spirits rising, and cleared a narrow channel until the boat lay under the lee of the land. There, as the sun went lower and disappeared over the horizon, they decided to remain until dawn next day. When daylight came they took their oars and pulled out again—two small cockleshell craft with ten survivors aboard. By noon two and a half days after the loss of their ship, they sighted land. Carefully, skillfully, they beached their craft, climbed out onto hard dry sand, stretched their aching legs, then lay down. Dozing, they regained their senses three hours later and took tally of

their number—nine men and one woman. She was Mary Jewell, wife of Joseph Jewell.

First Mate Barty Brown, a man who had come up the hard way, had nine men and one woman in his charge. He mustered them where they sat and wrote their names, their home addresses, names of next of kin carefully on a sheet of paper torn from a book of navigation. Peter MacNevin, Cornelius Drew, Andrew Morrison, William Scott, David McLellan, Joseph Jewell, his wife, David Ashworth, Hayman, and Singuily. He divided them into watches, and set the first watch the task of gathering driftwood and building a fire. He forgot nobody had the means to light the wood, until Jewell produced a match; just one match, wrapped lovingly in a piece of torn oilskin. So they lighted it. And Barty Brown told them: "Now it's kindled, understand, it must never be permitted to go out. By night, the flames may be seen from a passing ship; by day, using green wood and anything else we can use, we'll create a column of smoke that can also be seen."

They smashed open the tins of soup, a few each day, and shared it. When the rains fell they caught the precious liquid, hoarded it, and dished that out too. They trekked inland, seeking spring water; and as they went they discovered the skeleton stays of what had once been a hut, perhaps built long ago by whaler men who had been forced ashore and made themselves comfortable until they could get away once more.

Brown superintended the rigging of tattered sailcloth around the gaunt, bare bones of what had been the hut; he himself entwined thin branches with foliage to form some sort of roof, and closed off one small portion so that it formed an apartment for Mrs. Jewell. Then, making



one of the two boats moderately seaworthy, he selected four seamen, set out to explore a neighboring islet, and there discovered seals. They stalked them, killed and took back what they could, and used their haul for food and to fashion crude garments for their bodies.

So passed long winter months; then came warmer weather and sunshine; but there was a chill in their hearts with the knowledge that months might well stretch into years without hope of rescue. Brown took baulks of timber, shaped it into pieces, the pieces into miniature boats on which he carved the words *General Grant*, names of the survivors, and their present estimated position and location. Then, fashioning crude sails, fitting the small fleet with keels shaped from the soup cans, and another portion of the polished metal to act as reflectors in the sunshine, he launched them and watched the gallant little fleet sail away and disappear from sight. That night they fell to their knees, praying that some passing vessel would sight the tiny craft and come to rescue them.

But the days slipped by into weeks, the weeks into months, and hope ebbed.

Barty Brown made his decision, called together his companions, and explained the position exactly as he saw it.

"We can't go on like this. So far, we've come through without much sickness, but some of us might well fall ill, and there's nothing, neither medicine nor drugs, we could use in such circumstances. We have two lifeboats, both reasonably serviceable; the weather's fine, and so I propose asking for volunteers to come with me seeking help."

He waited, watching for reaction. And three seamen stepped forward; MacNevin, Morrison, Scott.

He told them: "You realize what it may mean? We might get through and make a landfall; we might not. But you're game to come with me, and we'll provision the pinnacle as best we can, rig a sail in her, and do the best possible."

In that boat they stacked a store of cooked seal meat, the eggs of sea birds, the last remaining cans of soup—and settled themselves aboard with a tethered wild goat they had found roaming the island. Brown grinned: "If it does nothing else to earn its keep, maybe we'll get milk." And away they went, pulling into the setting sun until darkness swallowed them up. The date was January 22, 1867—and neither Barty Brown, Scott, Morrison, nor MacNiven was ever seen again.

Back on the island, the remainder of the *General Grant*'s survivors set to work, explored still further islands in the vicinity. They came across one obviously used in the past by whalersmen and sealers, where they found a couple of usable ovens, two rusted axes, nails, and sheet iron stacked in a neat pile. They rigged one oven as a water condenser, and the other, overhauled, as a cooking stove. They built themselves a hut and fitted it with bunks. Then, on October 6, precisely eighteen months after the loss of *General Grant*, ten months after they had called farewell to Barty Brown and his companions, they sighted a sail.

Frantically they scrambled back to their never-dying fire, piled it with fresh wood until the flames roared into the skies, stood there, scarcely daring to breathe—and watched the ship maintain course to pass their island.

They raced to the water's edge, launched their remaining boat, pulled after her, and failed in the attempt; they lay on their oars as the vessel slipped over the horizon and was lost to sight.

Two weeks later MacLellan lay down and died, alone, untended; they buried his body and took stock once more; they told each other there was now little hope.

On November 19 their lookout yelled: "A ship! Out there!"—and the vessel sailed past them and away. On November 21 another sailing vessel came out of the east, closer than any of the other ships had come. This time there must be no doubt, nothing left to chance.

They launched their boat, manned the oars, pulled on them with every ounce of remaining strength, calling at the top of their voices as they rowed out; with the last vestige of strength in their bodies they turned their craft ahead of the passing ship, headed her off, and waited. It was the whaler *Amberst*, homeward bound for New Zealand; her skipper, Captain Gilray, took them aboard, heard their story, snuggled them down, and proceeded on his way.

Such was the story David Ashworth told his companions in the 48-ton schooner *Daphne* as her master, Captain Wallace, took them toward the scene of the tragedy. They knew from experience that vast stories had been told throughout New Zealand and Australia about *General Grant* and her cargo of gold, of the "spelter" that might have been—anything but spelter. They knew that one or two other gold-seeking expeditions had been fitted out and sailed—and failed to find anything. But now, with a man like Wallace, in this sturdy little schooner, now there would be success; they could not doubt it.

"You reckon that'd be the place where *General Grant* struck, m'lad?"

David Ashworth studied the frowning headland over on the starboard bow, studied the threatening outline of the place, noted the sheer sides of the headland, remembered the nightmare that had attended them when *General Grant* stuck her blunt nose into that dark, dripping wet, dismal hole and was devastated. He nodded.

"That's it, Captain Wallace. It is. This is the place, all right!"

"Then the search is ended, youngster. And, with a fair amount of luck, those memories you've had will soon be the happier." He yelled: "Get that boat cleared away. There's no need to provision her; we'll not be absent from the ship more than an hour at the outside. I'll need four of you men to come with me and Mister Ashworth here."

So they went. And, weeks later, *Daphne* returned to Invercargill; aboard her was a crew of three seamen, almost bereft of speech. They told how they had waited an hour, two, three hours, a day and a night, another day and another night. And neither Wallace nor Ashworth nor their four shipmates had come back. They had vanished, as utterly, as completely as all traces of the *General Grant* had vanished.

The tough whalemens, the sealers who had known those mere spots on the charts around there, had given those tiny islands the craziest names in their time. Craziest of all, perhaps, yet to be proved so pitiably true, was the name they had given to that speck of land long, long ago—long before *General Grant* had found it of her own strange free will and there gone to her doom: Disappointment Island. Why? That could be anybody's guess.

# 14.

## *Fire in a Floating Hotel*

FOR the best part of ten years, it had been a period of wonderful nonsense, prosperity, and plenty of money, with fun-mad folk flinging themselves around in all directions and getting precisely nowhere. Skeptics who regarded the era with misgiving coined their own phrase for it; they called it "The Age of Flaming Youth," shook their heads, and prophesied that, not so very far ahead, a price would have to be paid—a heavy price that would bring ordinary folk to an abrupt standstill with a nasty jolt.

Optimists, myopic maybe, pointed to the fact that this was an era of youth, and look what youth was managing to achieve. Youth was putting a thing called radio on the world's map; youth was pioneering air travel; youth was having a swell time, and richly deserved it. And, slowly, the years of that age crawled along—until, in 1929, motor cars and motor trucks were halted around Wall Street by milling, gaping crowds who stumbled against the horses of mounted police and stumbled away, too dazed to know precisely what was happening, or maybe about to happen. For 1929 was witnessing the close of that

Age of Flaming Youth; the backcloth was beginning to drop on it all; and something called the Great Depression was rearing an ugly head.

Depression began settling like a blight on all America, spreading its grisly fingers far and wide, and taking a firm grip on the lives of everybody, regardless of caste, class, or creed. Franklin Delano Roosevelt knew just what all this could mean, not merely to a nation but to the world generally, and made plans to avert total catastrophe. Men in blue, fingers on triggers, started a clean-up of the darkest spots of a nation's crime, and a thug named Dillinger died; they said he was the last of his kind. They said just that. They already knew that Depression meant chaos, disruption of industry, bread lines. Not for another four or five years was the United States of America to get back anywhere near normal. It was 1934. And, in the late afternoon of September 5, 1934, a floating hotel, as luxurious as they made them, slipped out of Havana, heading for New York. They called it *Morro Castle*, the vacation cruise ship to beat all cruise ships everywhere; at least, that was what passengers called this big vessel with her gleaming brasswork, her spotless white paint, her sheer luxury. Seamen thought a bit differently about her, recalling incidents in her brief past.

One year ago, almost to the day, dodging the vortex of a hurricane sweeping its path around Cape Hatteras, with sixty-foot seas coming at her in a mad fury, *Morro Castle*, dicing with death, somehow had managed to survive. Nobody knew just how. And a couple of months later, her deckhouses felt the shock and impact of bullets when she was caught in a cross fire between gunboats lying in the harbour and a shore battery in Havana; it was

just "one of those things," just a flare-up during a mercifully brief revolt in Cuba. But it could easily have sent *Morro Castle* to the bottom of that gay harbor.

But the liner lived on, only to be plagued by her hoo-doo when, on two occasions, flames somehow took hold of her—might well have swept through the entire ship and gutted her—but for her automatic fire detection equipment. Nobody ever knew the exact cause of those two fires; all they could say about them was that "they appeared to have a suspicious origin."

That fire detection system aboard *Morro Castle* was, they said, quite unique; indeed, there was nothing quite like it in any comparable liner. She had everything, when it came to fighting the demon fire; they had fitted her with the world's best foolproof gear—queer gadgets which could discover flames, confine flames, extinguish flames automatically, just like *that!* And every single part of this extraordinary equipment had been inspected, tested, and passed by federal inspectors; every single part of it, everywhere—save in *Morro Castle's* public rooms. Those federal men had been unable to check the gear in those rooms for the simple reason that no automatic fire detection system had been fitted where, chances were, it *could* be needed *most*.

But that was just a minor thing in a liner fitted with heavy steel fire doors that had been specially installed so that, by closing them tight, the entire vessel would be instantly divided into fireproof compartments. The moment those heavy doors clanged shut, fire would be confined to one small portion of *Morro Castle*, and then, her automatic gear coming into instant action, the fire would be put out. It was as simple as that.

So simple, in fact, so secure was this vital knowledge that her master, Captain Wilmott, during her present cruise, had ordered just a couple of boat drills to answer the fire calls put out from the bridge; even then, when the men mustered, all they were required to do was lounge around until an officer strolled up, called their names, and waited for them to answer the roll. The passengers? Good heavens, passengers were not to be worried unduly *on a cruise*; they had not paid hard money to join a liner of this luxury type to be required to muster on deck at their fire stations. And as for practical fire *drill*, that was totally out; Wilmott himself had been all against it, advised his owners to that effect, got their warm and full approval; especially when he reminded them that fire drill and fire-station musters among passengers could conceivably cause dismay among them . . . and cruise customers, in those days when the ugly face of Old Man Depression still looked on the United States longingly, were hard to come by. Ships like *Morro Castle* at that period needed all the passengers they could possibly get; and, as Captain Wilmott said: "Aboard my ship, they're safer than they would be crossing Times Square."

So she cruised toward New York. September 5, September 6, September 7; and that was her last day out. Tomorrow she would tie up at her pier, Ward Line's Pier 13, on the East River, and it would all be over. All the fun and the gaiety of a luxury trip down to Havana and back would be finished.

September 7 was not the finest day for cruise folk, for the seas were nasty, squally, feeling the weight they could easily carry if or when a vicious wind elected to



come up. And it rained, rather hard, until banks of fog came rolling in, wrapped themselves tight around *Morro Castle*, and made navigation a trifle more difficult than it had been. But just a trifle—no more than that. Not even a nor'easterly wind could dispel these fog banks, though it brought a shiver to the spines of anybody foolish enough to remain on deck.

Somewhere up in her bows *Morro Castle's* foghorn had been started, and it wailed its dismal sound into the thick veil that had fallen and was almost obliterating her from human sight. On deck it was cold, cheerless, clammy; not the sort of evening anybody but idiots elected to be out.

But in *Morro Castle's* main saloon things were different, a lot different. In the diffused glow of floodlighting and colored lights, streamers and balloons floated gently; somewhere, very gently but with a promise of the fire it could produce when wanted, an orchestra played the strains of a popular hit. Men in tuxedos, girls in fabulous gowns, swayed across the floor, their bodies close together, sliding, undulating to the music. The throbbing rhythm went on and on until Captain Wilmott entered the saloon, regarded the gay scene, and walked slowly toward the captain's table. For this was his traditional farewell dinner, the last crazy fling of a highlight cruise, the last chance among everybody gathered there to demonstrate the current cry: "Forget the Depression!"

Stewards moved around silently, suavely, serving the first course, and a momentary lull of conversation ensued, but not for very long. Wilmott quite suddenly stopped talking to his nearest neighbor, lifted one arm, and placed a hand directly under his heart. His face had gone gray,

drawn in pain; and, very slowly, his body fell forward. Someone said: "He's got a bad attack of indigestion." Someone else advised: "Get him to his room. He'll be all right soon." Gently, willing hands laid hold of Wilmott, lifted him, and carried him out from the big saloon. And as they went, the gay balloons and the colored streamers lost their attraction, drifted away, and fell unnoticed to the floor. Stewards came back and forward between tables, removing course by course, much of the food barely tasted, some of it quite untouched; and so the meal ended.

Captain Wilmott's personal program included dancing which would continue into the early hours for anybody energetic enough; and the orchestra started playing. But before any more than half a dozen couples were treading a step, an officer entered the saloon and announced that Wilmott was dead. He had suffered a severe heart attack.

The majority of folk in that big saloon felt the human pang that attends sudden, unexpected death; they walked out quietly and went to their cabins. But, to a minority, this sort of thing was "just too bad"; on an expensive cruise, especially on the final evening, one did not expect someone to pass out like that. Especially the host of the evening! So they too left the big saloon, went to their cabins, popped the corks from the bottles they carried, and settled down to some earnest, hard drinking. Life was like that.

Bill Warms, suddenly captain of the *Morro Castle*, no longer just first officer, walked the navigating bridge; below that bridge, in his own room, lay Captain Wilmott, now no longer the bluff, hail-fellow-well-met seafaring man he had been for so many years, but gone the way of all human flesh.

Warms was distressed—Wilmott had been a good man to serve under. He glanced at the clock face, dimly lighted in the wheelhouse; saw the soft glare of the binnacle on the face of the helmsman. It was, as near as made no difference, 2:39 A.M., and the day was September 8. He took another step or two in his perambulation—and stopped short in his confident stride when a figure came running.

“Midships, sir. There’s sparks ’n’ smoke coming out of a port ventilator. There’s fire someplace!”

Warms stiffened and called Second Officer Hackney, promoted by the death of Wilmott to first officer.

“Somewhere amidships, Mister Hackney. The deck night watchman reports fire coming from a port ventilator. Get down there, quick as you can, see what it’s about, then report back here. Step lively!”

But Hackney had gone not more than six steps down the bridge companion ladder before a second dim figure came racing toward the navigating bridge. It was the saloon night watchman.

“Fire, sir. Fire in the writing room!”

“Okay, you two men. Let’s go.”

The three of them ran aft along B deck, reached the writing room, and there were stopped short by flames that came leaping from a locker; flames fanned into fury as they tasted the varnish on the veneer panels around the room; flames that were speeding toward the ceiling, swallowing furniture and a myriad inflammable hangings as they sped. Hackney wrenched an extinguisher from its bracket, turned its fine mist on the flaming demon, knew his effort was useless, and flung the thing away.

"Sound the alarm! Get those hoses out. Extinguishers won't do anything against this."

Seconds passed. The ship's alarm had been sounded and men came a-running, as fast as their racing feet would carry them, right past those big, heavy, steel fire doors . . . and forgetting, as they ran, for just what purpose those doors had been built into the ship. Had they clanged them to, acted with split-second timing, the doors would have imprisoned those flames, confined them to the writing room, let them tackle them there on the spot, fight them, quell them. But nobody touched those big, heavy doors—*because no man had ever been assigned to close them*. The saloon night watchman had, in fact, never known the exact location of the fire doors; he had heard about them vaguely, but that was all.

The fire, roaring exultantly now, selected its course, snatched at the flimsy veneered walls and decorative ceiling, consumed them, discovered a space where outside air was coming in, and used it to fan itself into even greater fury; the air was coming in, faster every second, from between the devastated ceiling and an uninsulated deck above. That meant suction, and suction meant the flames could spread with maniacal speed right along and through the hollow ceilings all along B deck compartments. *And there was now nothing to stop that rush of flaming destruction.*

Originally built especially for work in tropical seas, *Morro Castle* was in fact one vast honeycomb of air vents, stairways, elevator shafts, portholes; at a time like this all the world's most unique fire-detection gear would be hopelessly useless.

And as the fire demon went its way, destroying, con-

suming everything in its frightful path, up on the bridge Acting Captain William Warms kept *Morro Castle* heading at eighteen knots for New York, into an increasing wind touching twenty knots. The wind sucked that fire demon unrestricted now, down and right through the liner's entire ventilation system, until choking black smoke enveloped the vessel and made breathing almost impossible—made it impossible, too, for anyone aboard to see just what was happening or where they were going. That fire had now been going exactly seventeen minutes.

At four minutes before three o'clock Warms ordered the sounding of general alarm, but even as the noise swelled and rang throughout *Morro Castle*, he knew it was too late. Onto her decks, out of their cabins, in sheer nightdresses, without wraps, regardless of the biting wind, came panic-stricken women; some were too terrified to know exactly what was happening, some were past caring. Some ran, tugging clothes around their bodies, crying out for directions about lifeboats. Behind them and among them ran half-dressed male passengers, too dazed to realize the desperate strait all were in.

So they came, fear possessing them all, battling in a frenzy on stairways, staggering back from other escape routes because flames barred their path. Amidships was an impassable barrier of fire . . . yet no member of the liner's crew made any effort to show the fear-crazed folk *the safe exits by way of Morro Castle's inside service companionways*. Those exits were known *only* to her crew, not to passengers. And nobody thought about those safety exits.

Someone, someplace, smashed a window, then a sec-

ond, then others, yelled out: "Lend a hand pulling the people through. It's their only chance. They're trapped!" Somewhere else, someone started a concerted rush for the starboard lifeboats, but the flames denied them; they turned about, raced back below decks and into cabins so far escaping the inferno of fire, pushed their heads through opened ports, found themselves trapped, and screamed for help which now could never reach them.

Across on the liner's port side, lifeboats were already aflame in their chocks, but three girls and half a dozen seamen scrambled toward a boat so far untouched and scrambled aboard as a steward knocked away at the holding davits. That boat went down toward the leaping seas, but at one end only; the other end was firmly held up there, at a forty-five degree angle, its nine occupants clinging to the gunnels while molten glass from shattered windows on deck above showered down on them. Then the lifeboat dropped free, felt the water around her, was pulled away from that burning inferno with long sweeps of her oars, headed for land—a boat with accommodation for sixty-eight souls, fifty-nine short of its permitted complement.

On *Morro Castle*, on B, C, and D decks, those who were able to move huddled against the rail; senselessly, idiot-wise, a girl started singing a popular song hit, drowning the words of a small group nearby whose lips muttered a prayer. And through it all the liner steamed ahead, gathering the wind as it went, sending it back to help fan the flames that spread everywhere. Here and there passengers cried out in terror, ran to the rail, climbed, threw themselves out into the seas, and were

sucked under the big hull, drowned or crushed and left to die.

Warms was still confident that the fire could be brought under control, still unwilling to put out a radio signal. For when a master orders his radio operator to send that call, it can cost the owners of a ship, especially a luxury ship, a great deal of money. Money was tight. And, another thing, a radio call for assistance, if proved to be unnecessary, can cost a captain his job. Warm's wanted none of that threat.

Sitting at his transmitter, though, first operator Rogers awaited orders from the bridge to send his call. The orders were not forthcoming; Rogers decided he could wait no more. He turned to his assistant: "Get up to the bridge. Ask 'em for permission for us to send SOS." And second operator Alagna was not slow in getting away on his mission. But Warm's said no, not yet.

Telephones clamped to his ears, Rogers listened—and out of the night came a voice. He stiffened in his chair.

"SS *Andrea Luckenbach* to Tuckerton can you give me news of a big ship afire somewhere off Sea Girt please?"

Tuckerton, New Jersey, Coast Guard replied: "Sorry." And at that moment waves of thick smoke penetrated to the radio room, choking Rogers at his gear. Alagna soaked a towel in water and handed it to Rogers, who wrapped it around his face. Then he set out for the bridge once more—and returned, horrified, to Rogers.

"It's awful up there, I tell you. Those guys're running around cackling to each other like a bunch of scalded hens. Can't get a sane word outa them!"

The time was exactly fifteen minutes after three o'clock. Rogers would wait no longer. Finger on his transmitter, he sent "CQ CQ," but no more. He waited another five minutes; then came permission from the bridge to transmit another call, but as yet not SOS. Rogers made the call, another "CQ CQ." Seconds later, the flames cutting connection between his gear and the liner's dynamoes, his transmitter died.

They jumped to it, the two of them, and coupled up emergency batteries in smoke so thick they could only feel, not see, what their fingers were doing. Rogers coughed. "Try the skipper once more; tell 'em up there if you don't get orders for me to send right now, then it'll be too late." Minutes later, Alagna was back. "Okay, go ahead. Send."

So, at 3:24, fifty-four minutes from the time of the first alarm to the bridge, Rogers broadcast his call, the first and only call *Morro Castle* was to make.

"SOS SOS *Morro Castle* on fire twenty miles south Scotland Light can't hold out much longer."

The emergency batteries, bursting from heat, spewed their sulphuric acid on the radio room floor; the resultant gases almost suffocated Rogers at his transmitter. His eyes closed. He felt terribly sleepy—*terribly*. But his assistant shook his dulling senses back to life: "Okay, this is *it*. Let's get outa here. Warms says so." Alagna half-dragged Rogers from his chair as the whole room belched with flame. One minute later lights everywhere failed, flickered, and went out. From the bridge, Warms had rung down to the engine room, stopping the engines. Everything stopped—pumps, fire hoses, communication system, steering gear. Now, only the creeping, searing



flames illuminated *Morro Castle* and all left in her. Above their heads, in the darkness up there, the big exhaust pipes started bellowing like maddened beasts, blowing off her pent-up steam. The noise was shattering.

Panic gripped every remaining soul aboard; perhaps not all, for engine room men, just about all in, were crawling wearily through an escape hatch toward the stern, they hoped, toward some vestige of breathable air. And there, astern, they came upon huddled groups, praying, crying, and screaming. And, a few paces away, by the rail stood three figures—mother, father, son—peering through driving rain at those friendly lights dotted along the Jersey coast line. Without a word to each other, father and son silently recalled the times they had gone cruising in a small craft in those same seas, out there.

"See, boy? There they are, the two of them—Ambrose and Scotland Lights. This wind's onshore. I guess we could make it. Let's go. We'll float ashore with our lifebelts."

"You go with Mother. I guess I'll stick around awhile and see if I can't lend a hand some place. I'll be okay. Don't worry."

He helped his mother to mount the rail, kissed her, hoped she could not see, in this darkness, that he had no lifebelt. There was not another belt left, anywhere. He watched them, hands held tight, jump together into the seas; as they disappeared, he turned, walked aft, climbed the rail, took hold of a line trailing astern, and lowered himself into the seas.

Around him the youngster could see dark shapes, shadowy things; a couple of lifeboats, half-empty, drifted slowly past, trailing ropes to which clung frozen

fingers whose owners were half-dead or quite dead; and as a gray dawn came, so did flames burst through C deck to send a swarm of terror-stricken passengers down into the water, most of them sinking from sight on contact with the leaping seas.

Thirty minutes went by. Then from the steamship *Andrea Luckenbach* came the first rescue boat, picking up the boy who had said farewell to his mother and father, snuggling him down safely, setting off again in search of other swimmers. And from shore came a motor craft manned by five Coast Guards, and within five minutes the little boat was filled to capacity.

*Monarch of Bermuda* and *City of Savannah*, two big liners, sighting the flaming torch that had been *Morro Castle*, racing to give aid, appeared on the nightmare scene and took aboard survivors picked up by the Coast Guard cutter. Then three fishing boats, out for the day's catch, joined the rescue ships and pulled eighty-seven exhausted souls from death, though many of these survivors died before they were carried ashore. Then came lifeboats and private craft, lending a hand where they could.

Ashore, willing hands kindled fires, hastily rigged first-aid posts, brewed hot drinks, and prepared dry clothing. And all through that bleak day the seas brought the dead ashore, receded, left them there. So they established morgues at three different points along that shore line, the largest at Camp Moore, a short distance from Sea Girt, to hold forty-seven bodies. And still they came with every following sea.

Aboard all that was left of *Morro Castle* were Warms, the two radio operators, Rogers and Alagna, and thirteen

seamen. They stood together on the ship's fo'c'sle head as the Coast Guard cutter *Tampa* came alongside, made fast a hawser, and took the disintegrating liner in tow. But in that fast-rising wind the line parted; the wreck drifted away and piled herself up at Asbury Park, where, as the fog cleared and the sun came through, she towered above Convention Pier.

Three hundred and fifty thousand excited sight-seers converged on Asbury Park. With an eye to the main chance, boardwalk concession businessmen went straight into trade and netted a cool half-million dollars on that first day alone. Out there, right at Convention Pier, all that was left of *Morro Castle* continued to burn; and, within her stricken body, Captain Wilmott was cremated. Apart from him, 134 folk had made their last trip in *Morro Castle*. It was all over—the gay colored balloons, the streamers, the soft, diffused lights, the orchestra, the dancing. It was ended. This glorious gesture they had all made in the face of Old Man Depression.

Bill Warms and *Morro Castle*'s chief engineer were found guilty of incompetence and neglect of duty and went to jail; *Morro Castle*'s owners were fined \$15,000 for failure to enforce safety regulations and for placing the vessel "in charge of unqualified personnel." In April, 1937, the federal Circuit Court of Appeals cleared Warms and the chief engineer of the charges and added their rider that, had Captain Wilmott maintained proper discipline, his crew "would have acted adequately in spite of his death."

Out of that fearful tragedy, however, came thorough reorganization and enlargement of the federal marine inspection services, and far-reaching reforms of laws

affecting merchant marine personnel, demanding higher qualifications; new legislation was framed and drawn up covering every stage of merchant ship construction and operation. But, for all that, *Morro Castle* proved that, at the last resort, safety at sea must always remain dependent upon the human touch; upon split-second decision; upon clear, sane thinking; upon guts and ice-cold courage.

# 15.

## *A Classic of Marine Salvage*

BOTH World Wars provided a hundred and more incidents which could, with grim truth, be included in a record of wrecked ships. The list is long, tragic, often courageous; and each individual story is surely an epic of its kind. In the Second World War, the enemy needed to slash the pipelines of shipping bringing to beleaguered Britain the sinews of war and the necessities of life, after the fall of France. More than anything else, Hitler intended to stop those supply ships; but he failed, and lost his war.

Kaiser Wilhelm had adopted the same tactics a quarter-century before, and failed too; but both of them, in the earlier days of conflict, were after prizes far surpassing ordinary supply ships. Their main target, during both early periods of the two World Wars, were the treasure ships which left British and other ports bound for America, carrying bullion. Had they been able to sink or to seize the majority of such vessels, they might well have conquered.

In one day alone, \$1,350,000,000 worth was shipped, in every conceivable type of vessel, across the 3,000

miles of North Atlantic until, toward the end of 1940, America's Federal Reserve Bank announced that it "had taken into the vaults from foreign sources a total of between \$600,000,000,000 and \$725,000,000,000 in gold."

History had repeated itself.

The liners *Laurentic* and *Megantic*, of 15,000 tons, built in 1908 and 1909, were ordered for the Dominion Line as *Alberta* and *Albany*, but were reallocated and renamed while building. *Laurentic* was designed in many ways experimentally; she had a new type of main machinery, reciprocating engines turning outboard screws and then exhausted into a low-pressure turbine which turned her central propeller. Her performance was remarkable. Coal consumption was 12 to 15 per cent less than other vessels of her size.

She was constructed to accommodate 260 first-class, 420 second-class, and 1,000 third-class passengers, and after reallocation she sailed under the White Star house flag.

Her brief career as a passenger liner started with voyages to New York; she proved faster than her sister ship, *Megantic*, and was equal on occasions to a speed of seventeen knots in comfort, without undue strain; that was good going for a 15,000-tonner in those days.

But August, 1914, put an end to *Laurentic's* service on the North Atlantic. Commissioned by the British Admiralty as an armed merchant cruiser, she changed her color to slate-gray, stripped away her peacetime fittings, mounted guns, and played her not insignificant part at sea. Then, in 1917, in the Mersey she loaded aboard £5,000,000 (roughly \$25,000,000) worth of gold bullion

and sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia. Off Lough Swilly—which is a long, narrow salt-water bay, not a true lake—before *Laurentic* could clear the Irish coast, she met her end in an enemy mine field. On that tragic day, 350 souls who had been aboard the big liner accompanied her to the sea bed. It was a sad ending to a fine vessel, but it proved to be the beginning of the world's most classic achievement in marine salvage.

At that period in World War I, her gold was urgently needed to pay for American munitions and supplies; and \$25,000,000 could purchase a great deal. It was decided in London to make some sort of attempt to reach the wrecked liner.

They located her off the mouth of the bay, at a depth of 22 fathoms, 132 feet, exposed where she lay to the full run of North Atlantic weather from westward and northward; and any real wind force from southward fetched a nasty sea down the Lough. They examined the whole situation with infinite care and thoroughness; they reached the conclusion that diving could be done only from a fairly large ship kept in perfectly accurate station immediately over *Laurentic*, not allowed to swing in wind or in tide. Moreover, such a ship, despite anticipated weather conditions, at all times would be exposed to attack from mine-laying and marauding U-boats. Another vital point was that the use of such a ship in place of the normal diving boat would require the provision and placing of heavy ground tackle to hold her securely moored "at all four corners"; and this called for the most powerful capstans.

It would mean almost continuous work. That in turn called for steam or motor air compressors, for the normal

hand-operated diving pumps would be quite inadequate for such a task. Additionally, they installed a special recompression chamber to deal with any cases of compressed air illness—divers call it “the bends.” When the last stage of preparations was completed, the operation was given over to the command of Captain G. C. C. Damant, C.B.E., R.N.

Down went the first diver, and discovered *Laurentic* lying on her port bilge, her masts some sixty degrees from the vertical. At such an acute angle, it would be impossible for any man to stand, let alone maintain a foothold, on her deck. This was problem number one. Problem number two was the fact that, when *Laurentic* had been abandoned and her crew taken to the boats, the falls had remained loose at full length, sixty feet long, with heavy blocks at their ends, to be lashed like cats-o’-nine-tails by the run of the seas down there; so that a man working below in the dim light stood every chance of being hit by a fall washing into his body at the end of its line.

*Laurentic*’s gold cargo had been stowed in the second-class baggage room, and easiest access to this would be by a watertight door halfway down the liner’s side; they marked this obvious and only entrance by a floating buoy. Simple? It was the devil’s own type of job. They marked the place they would enter to get at the gold by that floating buoy—and then, like cats climbing a sloping roof at dead of night, hauled themselves along the broken starboard rail, hand over hand, dodging the heavy falls that kept swinging at them as they climbed. And all this time the ground swell, created by monstrous weights of water as crests and troughs passed over their heads, took



hold of them and tried to tear fingers away from their hold.

But they made it, surfaced, and reported on the position of the wreck and their plan of action. Then one diver went down again, took with him a charge of guncotton, adjusted it to a nicety on the stout steel doors of the entry port, and exploded the charge. A second diver went in to inspect; he found the doors displaced by the explosion and resting against the sides of the ship. Then he called for tackle, made it fast to the doors, gave his signal, watched them hoisted through gray-green seas up to the surface, break through, and disappear from sight up to the vessel moored above him. A third diver went down to make another inspection, and discovered that a heavy, barred steel gate denied them entry to the baggage room. They took down more guncotton, fixed it in position, blew the gate away, and hoisted it to the surface. Those few preliminary operations had occupied more than two hours of back-breaking work—work that would drive the average man clean off his head. But they had done it, and all according to plan.

Diver E. C. Miller was next to descend to the wreck. He reached the baggage room, opened the inner door with hammer and cold chisel, slid inside, and found his feet balanced squarely on bullion boxes. Each of those boxes measured twelve inches square and six inches deep; each weighed exactly 140 pounds; each contained £8,000 (some \$40,000) in gold.

One hundred and forty pounds—the weight of, say, the average man. Difficult enough to hoist at the best of times, ashore; but, down there, with the ground swell

coming at the divers, it looked like a task nobody could hope to achieve, despite the lightening effect of the water pressure. For they would need to ease each box out, take a firm hold of it, and climb with it up steep, slippery, dark passageways, round numerous corners without any outside assistance. Miller decided to have a try; he surfaced thirty minutes later with one box safely clutched to his body. Next morning he went down again and brought three more boxes to the surface—a total, now, of £32,000. Thirty-two thousand . . . and *Laurentic* had been carrying five million. It would be a stupendous task; but they were confident it could be done. They told each other on that second day that the back of the job had been broken; that, with ordinary luck, they would complete it “in a few weeks.”

But Lady Luck decided it would not be so; she enlisted the aid of Dame Nature, and between the two of them they cooked up conditions fearful enough for any man to cry “Stop!”

As the fourth box of bullion came out of the seas, the wind strengthened, veered to the northward, blew itself into a full gale, and stayed like that a week, until the nearby coast line was littered with wreckage from a liner that had once been the pride of Merseyside folk. And a great deal of this wreckage showed that the seas were penetrating deep into the broken hull of *Laurentic*, tearing it away from her body. If the swell was doing that, then just what could it be doing around that baggage room? Nobody quite knew.

The wind moderated; the moorings, which had suffered extensively, were taken up and relaid; the entry was reopened. But now *Laurentic* had settled deeper.

Originally she had been at sixty feet, but the last seven days had sent her deeper—forty feet deeper. And when the next diver went down to her, he discovered that it was possible to ease his body only a few feet along the passageway; that the roof had closed down until less than eighteen inches were left for a man to crawl through. Infinitely worse was the fact that this confined, narrow space was littered now with twisted, crumpled steel bulkheads and other wreckage. It was a severe setback.

They took down explosive charges, set them, heard the underwater rumble as they went up, and hoped to high heaven they had succeeded in their aim; and that was to clear that passageway inward by forcing the overlying decks by those explosions. It succeeded. They could reach the gold once more, but now only at a depth of 120 feet, right down to the sea bed.

They went in, crawled along that passageway with untold tons of wreckage above their bodies—wreckage that any moment might break loose, come crashing down, and trap them where they lay. And when they reached the position where the bullion had been, it was empty; the deck gaped before their eyes in vast jagged holes. They figured it out. Those bullion boxes must have slid away to port, downward, then dropped through decks and twisted bulkheads torn apart during collapse of the wreck in those seven severe days.

It was impossible; no man could use that entry port and hope to live for long, so they decided to abandon it. Above were five decks, and, so far as they knew, they were not supported by anything in particular; settling was going on every moment, every day and night. They

knew that much by the noises, the tremors which, one diver said, "occasionally disturbed us as, in darkness and far inside the hull, we struggled to squeeze our bodies through narrow chinks." So they could not go on that way; they looked around for some other means of entry. Finally they decided to cut down through the ship vertically, from right above the position where the bullion was judged to have lodged itself. They set to work and removed the entire structure, plate by plate, beam by beam, until they could report at least some real progress.

With high explosives they separated the crossbeams, detached them, and raised them one by one to the surface; they eased up decking sheets, hoisted a corner with wire rope, shoved a charge under it, fired that charge while the strain was still maintained.

Diver Blachford was doing just that late one day. Making fast his wire rope to a corner of a twisted steel plate, he had the corner eased up enough for him to crawl under and place his charge in position. The wire, stretched taut from the winch drum on the salvage ship above him, moved satisfactorily, inch by inch, lifting the steel. On the salvage vessel, they heard him speak on his telephone: "Lower my pipe and the line a little." Then: "Take in the slack of the firing circuit." Then sudden silence. A moment later the sea's surface broke as the wire rope snapped, curled into the air, and fell back on deck. They knew what it meant; a shackle had parted, the steel plate had fallen—and Blachford was trapped beneath it, utterly helpless.

Seconds ticked past. And Blachford's voice broke silence: "Give me all the air you can, please." They opened his valve wide. "That's better. A lot better,

thank you, but I can still do with some more. And could you get another diver down here, quick as you can."

On deck, diver Clare, already half-stripped of his gear for a spell off duty, climbed back into it. His helmet was screwed down; he grabbed a new wire rope, new slings to hold the plate up, and prepared to go down to his pal.

But Blachford could have no more air; the pressure gauge showed that an excess of the precious stuff might end in bursting his diving dress, tearing it apart and flooding it. Yet he needed that excess of air to keep the seas back from his face lying prone down there. On the salvage vessel they heard the roar of the air already passing through his helmet; the noise drowned Blachford's voice. They had to hear what he was trying to tell them; to do so, they had to throttle the air supply. And when they did that and could hear the stricken man speak, he said: "More air. Please, more air."

They balanced the obvious risks and decided to give him no more. Diver Clare went down, holding Blachford's air pipe in his fingers to guide him to the exact position. Ten minutes later Blachford broke surface, grinned at them, told them: "Another minute or two, and that plating would've broken my back clean in two!" It was not until they told him about the risk of excess air bursting his dress and drowning him that he understood. He nodded: "You've a point there."

Meanwhile, in and around those Western Approaches, the U-boats were still hard at work, most of them mine-laying; busy, too, were the Royal Navy's minesweepers, cleaning up "the litter," now and then exploding one of the mines in their sweeps. When that happened a couple

of miles away from the sunken *Laurentic*, divers received such violent and dangerous shock it was decided to suspend all diving while the minesweepers worked anywhere within a five-mile radius. Two days later another enemy mine went up at the edge of a six-mile radius from the wreck, and another diver suffered.

But they went ahead—two solid, heart- and back-breaking months of undersea shipbreaking—and then, with a sigh of solid relief, they once more reached that gold; or rather, as they were soon to discover, an isolated portion of it. So they went in search of the remainder. They smashed through the passenger accommodation and hauled out broken timber, wrecked furniture, bedding, wooden decking and paneling, provisions, a thousand and one other items of ship's gear—hauled it out by hand, piled it into a giant hopper lowered from the salvage ship, and watched each hopper hauled to the surface, to be lowered again for a repeat operation, time and time again. And among the wreckage, diver Miller found ten loose gold bars; he followed up the clue and uncovered still more. By the end of that month, they had recovered £800,000 worth of the precious gold cargo.

Then came winter's weather, and work was suspended until spring came again; but a full eighteen months were to pass before they could return to the wreck and start anew. When they did at last, they found that *Laurentic* had changed very little, and at once their efforts were rewarded. Among the debris down there, they found another £470,000 worth of gold without a lot of real difficulty; then the flow stopped and there was no more at hand. They decided that, during the previous collapse of the wreck the bullion must have divided itself into

two distinct portions; that the major part of it now lay hidden below the liner's smoking and dining saloons, which so far had not collapsed.

World War I had ended months before; it was now spring, 1920, and when they returned to the scene they found that the winter seas had done all the excavation that had been needed. All? No, not quite; for now the uppermost layers of steel plating had to be shifted; and when they moved away this obstruction with explosives, it was only to be faced with the knowledge that during the winter gales countless tons of rubbish had been forced into the entries made previously, closing them entirely; and that, down there on the sea bed itself, those same undercurrents had washed heavy stones and sand into their working quarters, case-hardened them, and sealed up everything quite effectively.

For more than twelve months, right through the fine summer weather of 1920 and 1921, they fought the seas to drive their way back to the gold hoard. They tried blasting, they tried using giant pumps and dredging grabs, but failed. So they went back to hand work, and that proved the only reliable method of dealing with the barriers between them and their target. It was a slow, painfully slow, and heartbreaking task. In good weather, the divers won; when weather took a turn for the worse, they lost. The exact amount of the wreckage, the sand and the stones, that every diver cleared and had hoisted to the surface was weighed and recorded; they worked on the sea bed in thirty-minute spells, but worked at top speed. And when a man felt "the bends" coming on, he surfaced, went across to cylinders containing oxygen, put on the mask, and breathed it for ten minutes. No fuss,

no bother to anyone else—time was all too short. But one or two divers “felt queer” and went into the recompression chamber—and then went back to their work.

All told, in the record number of five thousand dives, there were exactly thirty-one cases of “simple bends”; even so, not one diver among those thirty-one cases was prepared to declare himself unfit, or to report his symptoms aboard the salvage ship.

They found several hundred gold bars buried deep in sand in troughs, or folds, formed in the shell of the wreck as it had crumpled; the only possible way to reach them was for a diver to go after it head downward, taking the smallest possible air supply, sometimes having that minimum stopped for a minute or so while he dug away with his fingers until an accumulation of air began lifting his body; then he quit, crawled out backward, raised his head to let the air escape, then went back to the job like a terrier routing out the inmates of a rabbit hole.

Diver Light was one of those “terriers.” He had just felt a gold bar at his finger ends and meant to get it; but he remained head downward a fraction too long, and his legs floated up to become entangled in torn steel plating; he was trapped and could move in no direction. His air supply stopped. He let go with both hands, and shot up from the wreck like a bullet from a rifle; he was trailing forty feet of air line, and when that length had paid itself out, Light stopped his journey upward—stopped with a jerk, and there remained moored, upside down.

He had, in fact, reached a point of no return; he could not right his body, for the stiffness and the buoyancy of



his dress were too great for that. By telephone, he reported water in his helmet. He could not be seen either by other divers from the sea bed, or from the salvage ship above him.

Diver Blachford went down; his aim was to get astride Light's pipe, sever the lanyard, to ease his pal up to the surface. But immediately the lanyard was cut through, the great buoyancy of diver Light dragged them both to the surface in a flash. It had been touch and go.

Work during the summers of 1920 and 1921 yielded only fifty bars of gold. In the spring of 1922 the first man to dive saw a number of bars sticking out of the sand. The winter gales had been working to aid them; between April and October nearly £1,500,000 worth was salvaged, then the weather broke again. But they were well pleased. The record day's haul had been £150,000.

When the bullion was brought aboard the salvage ship, it was plain for all to see the tremendous battering *Laurentic* and everything that she had carried had been subject to. Strong though the bullion boxes had been, now there was barely a trace of them. The gold bars themselves, spilled from their boxes by pounding seas, were twisted, some doubled right up into U shape, others squeezed flat as if they had been putty.

The following spring work started again. This time length of dives for each man was limited to not more than thirty-five minutes on the sea bed, with thirty minutes spent decompressing in mid-water. Competition was keen as mustard; the daily tally of each man was recorded and reckoned up, day to day, and the diver who produced £45,000 in one dive was rewarded with a tin of cigarettes. In his official log Captain Damant recorded:

“Human nature being what it is, there was a tendency for some men to spend their whole half-hour poking about for the odd bar, getting the derrick wires down to turn over likely steel plating, leaving the job of dull sand-shifting to the next chap. It was odd to find oneself cursing X for bringing up untold gold, and blessing Y for producing a sack of dirty sand and stones—yet there was no doubt that the remainder of the gold would give itself up in greater bulk than ever if only that sand could be got rid of!”

Sand cannot be shoveled under water. Pumps and other mechanical means had failed. Now, man power was on trial; and though the issue was doubtful, at long last the corner was turned. Here was a new competition, and one with not a vestige of luck attached; for ten days the weights of sand per diver steadily increased as brains came to the aid of brawn, and as each diver tried out new ways to cut seconds and get an extra three or four pounds weight of sand. They used strange-shaped tools, fashioned by the smith aboard the salvage ship; they shoveled the wretched stuff into sacks, into the mouths of which were secured steel hoops; they used fire hoses; they used their bare hands. They shoveled that dirty sand like fiends, and gloated in the daily tallies they recorded. And as they shoveled, the ghost of that big liner moaned and groaned near them; shattered plates and timber baulks sometimes gave way, came adrift, and clattered through the seas to the ocean bed. But they kept on shoveling.

And their efforts were rewarded. Eighteen inches to a couple of feet deep in the uncovered sand, they found

gold bars; all they had to do was to pick them up. During 1923, nearly £2,000,000 worth of *Laurentic's* bullion cargo was brought to the surface. It meant that, from the liner's total cargo of gold, only 154 bars still remained to be recovered—just about £240,000 worth. The following spring and early summer, salvage ship *Racer* and her crew steamed out to Lough Swilly for the last time, and down went her divers. And up they came again, having searched no less than two thousand square feet of the sea bed—and found there 129 of the missing 154 bars.

They wrote their total tally, neatly and very precisely, almost like a schoolmistress showing a simple sum on her blackboard to a class of children; and it went like this:

Year	1917:	Number of bars salvaged . . . . .				542
"	1918:	"	"	"	"	0
"	1919:	"	"	"	"	315
"	1920:	"	"	"	"	7
"	1921:	"	"	"	"	43
"	1922:	"	"	"	"	895
"	1923:	"	"	"	"	1,255
"	1923:	"	"	"	"	129
						<hr/>
Total:						3,186
						<hr/>

When they had loaded her in Liverpool, *Laurentic* had carried precisely 3,211 bars. Subsequently, figures proved that the entire cost of the operation amounted to between 2 and 3 per cent of the total value salvaged. There were no accidents, no loss of life. Just a magnifi-

cent job, magnificently well done—a job they originally had thought with a fair amount of luck, might be all over and done with “in a few weeks.” It had lasted seven years.

In the annals of marine salvage, the recovery of *Laurentic*'s gold far exceeds in point of value any other treasure recovery operation ever undertaken. It was an epic of pluck, skill, and indomitable purpose triumphing over vast difficulties.

# 16.

## *Riddle of a Doomed Freighter*

THE SQUAT single-funneled ocean-going tug, as powerful-looking a ship as they make them, swung idly at her ropes. There was something about her that spelled confidence, and, though her decks were empty, she was alert, waiting, listening, looking for trouble. For that was her job, trouble.

No ordinary ocean-going craft was this tiny giant. Her 4,000-horsepower engines made her one of the most powerful vessels afloat on the Seven Seas; and below decks, at her radio gear which could reach out and roam the entire world, three operators kept watch, listening for automatic alarm signals, for those twelve four-second Morse dashes, at one-second intervals, which mean danger.

Her skipper, gray-haired, clean-shaven, smiling Dan Parker, would have grinned if any stranger had suggested that his was a mission of mercy; and probably would have said, in his gruff manner: "Mercy? Not a bit of it. It's a job of work."

It cost her owners nearly \$150,000 a year to keep her at sea, to maintain her and her fully equipped workshops,

her store of vital spares. She always carried supplies enough to keep her at sea three months at a stretch, if the occasion demanded, and that meant burning up fuel oil at a tremendous rate. But Dan Parker was too old a hand at the game to use his supplies unnecessarily; he conserved them at all times, against the day when her radiomen received that call. And then she would slip her ropes, usually from the northern coast of Ireland, from which she could reach most of the main shipping lanes quickly, and disappear from sight.

Her job of work was simple. Somewhere out there a ship signaled distress, and she went to give help. Saving a stricken vessel meant big money; but laws of the sea never guaranteed payment, not until this squat little monster got that stricken ship safely into port. At Lloyd's, London, they call it "No cure, no pay!" and leave it like that—leave it all to await the result of the reply any one of the three radio operators would give to a desperate call for help. It was always the same reply: "Coming to your assistance with all speed." The name of this confidence-giving little ship? *Turmoil*—an admiralty ocean-going tug of 1,136 tons, chartered by a London company.

The violent storms which swept the North Atlantic, the Bay of Biscay, and the English Channel in January, 1952, played havoc with ships. *Turmoil* had already headed out into the teeth of a gale on New Year's Day, to take in tow and bring into Falmouth harbor the British tanker *Mactra*, an early victim of that period of monstrous weather. Six days, that job had taken *Turmoil*; now she waited yet another call for help.

When that call came, it came from the 6,711-ton Is-

brandtsen freighter *Flying Enterprise*, Captain Kurt Carlsen commanding.

For a full three days, *Flying Enterprise* shoved her bows into weather that, though vicious and taking hard jabs at the freighter every few hours, was increasing in intensity each hour that dragged by, until, as 1951 ended, an eighty-mile-an-hour wind hit her, cracking her clean across her deckhouse and down her stout sides. Carlsen acted swiftly, tried repairing the crack by shoring it temporarily with wire hawsers. It was a brave effort. But nobody knew what the weather had in store and meant to use against that stricken ship.

That wind suddenly veered and blew the ship far to the northward; Carlsen responded by steering south in an all-out effort to get back on to the regular traffic lanes. For a few hours it looked as if his efforts might succeed; but the following day another gale of cyclone strength came up, crashed into the freighter, and manhandled her, tumbling her in every direction at its mercy. Carlsen hung on to the wheel until the last moment; until, meeting with no response, he knew that his ship was no longer under his control. Then a tremendous sea crashed into the ship, stopped her in her drunken tracks, shifted her cargo, and sent her reeling with a list that looked as if she would turn over completely at any moment.

A second time *Flying Enterprise* split apart, right across Number 3 hatch, the seas flooding the hold beneath.

There was no sign of panic among her crew of forty-one, her passengers numbering ten; they mustered on her broken deck, awaiting Carlsen's orders. When those or-

ders came they were brief: "Abandon ship—and one member of the crew will be detailed to jump with each passenger." That was all. Carlsen? Skipper Carlsen stayed with his broken vessel, come what might. Days later, Carlsen told another captain, master of a Liverpool freighter that raced to his assistance: "After twenty-three years at sea, and most of them in the North Atlantic, I guess I had it coming to me. Masters are entrusted with lives and valuable cargo, and it is a responsibility we cannot let go."

He saw the last of his passengers and crew away; watched them leap, arms linked, into those icy seas, hoped to God they would soon be picked up. They were, by the American freighter *Southland*, a United States Navy craft, and a Panamanian cargo ship, standing by when *Flying Enterprise* was cracked apart the second time and went over to a list of thirty degrees. The survivors were landed safely at Rotterdam. And out there, aboard *Flying Enterprise*, Kurt Carlsen settled down to a lonely vigil. Nearly three hundred miles west of Land's End, awaiting the coming of *Turmoil*, which was battling through monstrous seas to reach him, he settled down to wait. Meanwhile, in *Flying Enterprise's* radio cabin, Carlsen started talking with the world outside.

He contacted his owners in New York; talked with the United States Navy supply ship *Golden Eagle*, some miles distant; then with *Turmoil*, still coming on toward the position he had given her. He told the commander of *Golden Eagle*: "Nothing new to report. Nothing exciting. It looks like it will get a bit lonesome, but I guess I



will get used to that. Sorry if this little affair upsets your schedule. You will lose a couple of days or so."

They grinned at that message aboard *Golden Eagle*; for a moment they thought Carlsen had finished sending, but his voice came on the air again: "No alarm clock aboard here, but I will try not to disturb you fellows."

*Golden Eagle* neared *Flying Enterprise*; and Kurt Carlsen wrapped his ship's logs and other vital documents in waterproof and sailcloth, made the bundle fast, tried to get it across to the Navy ship by drifting a life jacket, watched the bundle overwhelmed and then lost in the mountainous seas. They could see him, once in a while, silhouetted against the radio cabin; they marveled at the man's guts, at the way he slipped swiftly from deckhouse to deckhouse. Alone he was, yet intent in purpose. And they could do nothing to help him.

*Golden Eagle* closed as near as her commander dared, called Carlsen, told him to come over by jumping into the seas and they would pick him up. He told them: "No. I'll not chance it. I'm not scared of making the attempt. It isn't that. I'm concerned over the legal position once I leave my ship."

So they left him undisturbed the rest of that day, and watched him race in the dimming light from the radio cabin to a room he seemed to have made his quarters. Then, on the dot of six next morning, Carlsen got the radio working, called the world outside, and told everybody listening he meant to call every two hours while power lasted. And *Turmoil* was coming nearer with every hour that passed.

*Turmoil* said: "Immediately we reach *Flying Enter-*

*prise* we shall commence salvage operations, using our searchlight. But this weather must govern everything; all we can do is hope it will ease and then hold for the attempt." Dan Parker added a personal footnote to that message: "If this job is possible, my ship and my crew will be the ones to do it."

Carlsen came on the air once more: "My ship is rolling as much as eighty degrees." *Turmoil* called back: "Sounds bad. Might make the towing job almost impossible if your list goes that far."

Sunshine slanted along the yellow funnel of *Flying Enterprise* that morning as she lay wallowing in those seas. Above her, circling around, two Coastal Command Lancaster aircraft watched the crippled freighter, came down out of the skies to not more than one hundred feet, waited, and watched until Carlsen showed up from his temporary quarters, scuffled and crawled along to the radio cabin, and disappeared inside. The two Lancasters tried contacting him, but failed.

The seas had moderated a little by now, the weather looked as if it were becoming reasonably fair, clouds scudded in the still-strong wind across a mottled blue sky; and up in those Lancasters cameramen took shots of *Flying Enterprise* as the long graybeards of the Atlantic surged around and clean over her. She rode them all. And in the distance came the United States Navy destroyer *John W. Weeks*.

Shortly before three o'clock on Thursday, January 3, into United States Navy headquarters, London, flashed a call from the destroyer: "*Turmoil* has arrived alongside, preparations are under way for taking the ship in tow. She is listing heavily sixty to sixty-five degrees

and down by the head; her rudder and screws are clear of the seas, the rudder swinging free. *Turmoil's* skipper reckons he might tow her stern first in an effort to prevent further flooding of her hull. Captain Carlsen is still cheerful and intends to remain aboard his ship until *Turmoil* gets her safely into port. We shall stay here during the tow to take Carlsen off in an emergency."

The *John W. Weeks* closed with the stricken freighter, prepared a line, and fired it across her broken decks, linking the two vessels by that flimsy thread; then, using it, she sent over hot coffee, sandwiches, cigarettes, candy, and the day's newspapers. Carlsen reckoned he could use them, thanked the destroyer for the kindly gesture, and reaffirmed his intention to keep contact every two hours. He told them: "I'm okay. Getting some sleep on a mattress jammed between a bulkhead and the radio cabin. Got everything I need now, though my one remaining flashlamp isn't so strong a light as it might be." Kurt Carlsen was still quite confident that his ship would last through . . . providing the weather did not deteriorate.

But the wind had risen again; the seas were building up and increasing their weight; and, to top everything, fog started closing in. When daylight failed on January 4, *Turmoil* stood close in, waiting her chance to get a line aboard. With dawn, the wind force dropped from around thirty to sixteen miles an hour, the seas moderated; and Kurt Carlsen, six days alone now in his broken ship, soon had unexpected company. *Turmoil* came in as near as Dan Parker dared take her, and twenty-seven-year-old Kenneth Roger Dancy, first mate of the tug, eased his body off, climbed the stern of *Fly-*

ing *Enterprise*, and announced his arrival. He had come to stay.

They made five fruitless attempts then to take the stricken freighter in tow, abandoned the plan when it appeared quite hopeless. Once, the towing wire was taken to only two feet from the towing bitts, but would go no farther; it looked to be quite impossible, with the ship listing now until her main deck was at a seventy-degree angle. Dan Parker sized up the situation once more, confident that they would make it somehow, if only the weather showed one break. But overnight the wind built up to reach Force 7, twenty-eight to thirty-two knots, and *Flying Enterprise* started increasing her already dangerous list. And that night in Copenhagen, Mrs. Karen Carlsen, wife of a builder, mother of Kurt Carlsen, wept quietly when they told her *Turmoil* had failed to get her towline safely aboard her son's ship. Through the tears, she asked: "Why does it have to go on like this?" But none could tell her why; she said: "They can get plenty more ships, but they can never replace Kurt."

On the night of January 6 weather forecasts were not hopeful; they spoke of severe gales expected soon in the Atlantic. But out there, *Turmoil* had passed another towline to *Flying Enterprise*; it had been made fast, and, at three knots but no more, the stocky little tug was hauling the big freighter around, creeping slowly in the direction of Falmouth, with about 190 miles to go to safety.

At dawn next day the United States destroyer *Willard Keith* radioed: "They should reach port around noon Wednesday."

Aboard *Flying Enterprise*, Carlsen and Dancy were doing themselves proud; by way of a line fired from *Willard Keith*, they got steak, fruit, cakes, coffee, cigarettes, matches, and candles. It was a tough job getting those supplies aboard, but, said the two: "We reckon they were well worth the effort." Some time later that day, coming across a package of creamery butter, looking at it with lips watering, they used it to grease that vital towline to stop chafing. And away in the distance another stocky little craft, the French ocean-going tug *Abeille* 25, joined the strange convoy and followed it, ready to lend a hand if she were needed.

*Flying Enterprise* was losing her voice; it was failing because the radio emergency power ebbed away. So they passed any messages to Carlsen and Dancy by line. Quite a number of those messages came from publishers and newspapers and others who were prepared to pay Carlsen vast sums of money for his exclusive story. The whole thing, played out over a distance of a two-hour train journey, was fast becoming ludicrous. Not that Carlsen or his companion wanted anything to do with the commercialization of an epic, but just because Big Business ashore hated to let such an opportunity slip through its fingers. In Hollywood, film executives talked excitedly about the saga they intended shooting before long; they reckoned they would call it "The Flying Enterprise." They could not even think up any better title.

Into London Airport, on Monday, January 7, came Martin and Karen Carlsen, holding hands, looking around them perplexed. They had come from Copenhagen to "see our boy"; in their free hands, they held bunches of red roses and white carnations for him, for "our Kurt."

And in a little comfortable cottage at Hook Green, in Kent, grandmother, mother, father, and brothers Robert and Tony donned paper hats, pulled crackers at a belated Christmas feast, and toasted the missing member of the family, Ken Dancy, out there with Kurt Carlsen. That night, too, the flickering candles aboard *Flying Enterprise* were doused, one by one; in a long, oily swell of seas, dipping the port wing of her bridge clean under at times, like an awkward crab on the end of a fishing line the freighter still came on, at a steady three knots, towed by *Turmoil*. She was less than 120 miles out of Falmouth now.

Every two hours, Carlsen and Dancy inspected that towline, nursing it like mothers with babes, tending it against chafing. And, by way of another line, they received fresh supplies—ham and cheese sandwiches, fried chicken, coffee, candy, cigarettes, magazines, grease for their towline, padded gloves for their blistered hands. Satisfied with everything, they doused those candles of theirs, turned in, and slept like newborn infants. Their beds sloped at an angle of fifty degrees.

It had gone on long enough, much too long to suit the fickle pleasure of Dame Nature; she intended having no more of this nonsense, no more of this audacious attempt by a stocky little tug to take from her a 6,000-ton prize. With little more than fifty miles to go to make Falmouth harbor, the weather broke once more. One vast weight of water hit the freighter, lifted her high, and turned her until her long keel was exposed, her funnel almost down to water line. The rising seas swept in on her, hauled away her last lifeboat, and broke it neatly into splinters. The master of *Abeille 25*, following the little convoy,

radioed: "Ten tugs won't get that ship through a storm like this."

Falmouth folk had prepared to give Carlsen and Dancy the welcome of their lives; but now everything seemed in the melting pot. Somebody suggested the danger that the two men might yet lose their lives; that shocked everybody else. And United States Navy headquarters in London ordered: "If they appear to be in imminent danger, our destroyers will remove the two men from their ship." But things like that sometimes are easier said than done. It just remained to be seen; it was all in the lap of the gods.

On January 9 *Flying Enterprise* was still afloat; this was the thirteenth day of her saga. Drifting helplessly, barely thirty miles from Land's End, the towline parted, the stricken freighter wallowed in twenty-foot-high seas that swept across her decks; and with every hour that passed she went lower. Duffle-coated, Carlsen and Dancy were still aboard, still doing all they could, though that was little now. A beam of searchlight picked them out and traced their movements from radio cabin to wheelhouse and back again. By dawn, experts claimed, the ship would be drifting up the Channel of Fowey. A westerly gale was blowing.

If *Turmoil* could get another towline aboard, then, with luck, she might haul the big ship safely into Lyme Bay, Dorset, and beach her there. In a three-way radio conference, *Turmoil*, *Willard Keith*, and *Flying Enterprise* figured it all out. They wondered whether it might be possible for Carlsen and Dancy to lower one of the freighter's anchors so that the destroyer and *Turmoil*, towing a hawser between them, could sweep under the

ship, catch that anchor, and make a fresh tow. When they tried, clinging to sloping, torn deckwork, working frantically to achieve the effort, Dancy and Carlsen were nearly swept overboard. It had failed.

The hands of the clock aboard *Turmoil* stood at twenty minutes past three on the afternoon of Thursday, January 10. Captain Kurt Carlsen and First Mate Kenneth Dancy knew now that after thirteen dramatic nights and days the stricken *Flying Enterprise* was doomed. Now she lay almost flat on her side, seas sweeping her body from stem to stern. They were exactly forty-one miles from dry land; but now they could stick it out no longer.

Reluctantly, they signaled the escorting ships to close; and as they came, the two of them walked steadily along the freighter's funnel sloping into the seas, jumped, and floated in their life jackets for four minutes until *Turmoil* dropped a rope ladder and took them aboard. *Flying Enterprise* was down steep by the stern; debris washed away from her broken body; she was now no longer a ship. She just waited to die. Her stern went down; her bows rose high into the air, and she was gone.

Into Falmouth Bay came *Turmoil*, with Carlsen and Dancy both fast asleep; and when they woke at last, still dog-tired, Ken Dancy could say no more than: "The towline went. It went. And we're here without that ship."

They offered Kurt Carlsen a \$100,000 contract for his story; agents of a dozen companies crowded Falmouth, with well-filled wallets, ready, eager for Carlsen to name his price. Gifts—watches, radios, refrigerators, clothing—were pushed away by the man who had lost his ship. He



told them: "I do not want to have the efforts of two honest men to save a ship commercialized in any way." And that was that. A newspaper offered Ken Dancy £1,000 for his story; he said: "I didn't ask for it and I don't want it."

Forty miles off Falmouth and forty fathoms down—that was the end of the *Flying Enterprise*; or so the world thought. But, eighteen months later, Mario Raffaelli, diving from the Italian salvage ship *Rostro*, produced the riddle of the doomed freighter. Directing the operation, which came as a surprise to most folk, was Commendatore Giovanni Quadila, a man who knew most of the answers when it came to deep-sea salvage.

British, American, and Swiss interests had invested thousands in the venture; the Federal Insurance Company, of Zurich, said: "When the scheme for salvaging the cargo was discussed, we were told that there were large quantities of art treasures aboard the sunken ship, among them an almost priceless violin, a Stradivarius. We certainly insured large quantities of currency, of which about \$200,000 worth has already been landed at Ostend. But there are far more important objects in that ship, and they were insured by American companies who conceived this salvage operation."

What could it mean? In New York, at the offices of the Isbrandtsen Line, owners of *Flying Enterprise*, they shook their heads. They said: "So far as we know, there was nothing more than three or four hundred dollars aboard the ship, and that was for the captain's personal use. We do not know, of course, what was in those ten thousand mailbags the ship was carrying when she left port."

They mentioned nothing, though, about six small boxes which diver Raffaelli sought out and found in the sunken ship and brought to the surface. Apparently nobody knew of their existence. Therefore nobody could hope to know what those six boxes contained. Everywhere there was a discreet silence.

And then the Russian semiofficial journal *Red Fleet* published a story suggesting that *Flying Enterprise* had been carrying special top-secret telescopic sights and parts of V<sub>2</sub> flying bombs, sent from Hamburg to the United States War Department, Washington. On the face of it, an absurd story; but the Russian newspaper continued: "Captain Carlsen could have saved his vessel had he taken her into the port of Brest, but orders from the American War Department told him that on no account was he to allow his ship to be towed there."

Nobody would confirm or deny the Russian suggestions.

And yet, not so very long afterward, a rumor circulated that those six mysterious boxes were taken from the Italian salvage vessel and immediately flown by special aircraft to Washington; it was all top-secret stuff, this—E. Phillips Oppenheim with the lid off! Then, from another source in Switzerland, came word that those boxes had in fact contained ultrasensitive precision instruments of highest military value; that this was the reason why those two American destroyers, *Willard Keith* and *John W. Weeks*, had been dispatched with orders "Save that ship—at all costs."

Replied the United States War Department: "That? It's just another of those rumours."

In Hong Kong, aboard his new command, *Flying En-*

*terprise II*, Kurt Carlsen said: "I don't know anything about registered mailbags or six boxes of secret precision instruments. Even if I did, I wouldn't tell."

And then there was the matter of fifteen thousand watches diver Raffaelli brought aboard his ship, *Rostro*, and handed into the safe custody of Commendatore Quadila. What about those? Nobody apparently knew anything.

So there it was. Thousands of salvaged American dollars and British pound notes, dried out in the spacious kitchen of the Bank of Brussels; those six mysterious small boxes; 1,652 mailbags and 15,000 watches. And not a soul anywhere knew a thing about them all. Or, if they knew, they were not prepared to say a single word.

# 17.

## Black December Day

WHEN that superb liner *Normandie*, of 82,799 tons, once hailed as the "First Lady of the North Atlantic" and costing to build more than \$25,000,000, caught fire in New York Harbor in 1940 and was burned out on the Hudson mud, knowledgeable seafaring men shook their heads and said that a strange hoodoo which seemed to have dogged the fortunes of big ships flying the French Line flag could not be shaken off.

In many ways, maybe, they were right; for French Line vessels down the years had suffered many remarkable casualties, some of them unexplainable at the time of the incident, some never explained to the satisfaction of seamen.

In 1939, the 34,568-ton *Paris* caught fire in Havre and later was cut up for scrap metal by German troops. In 1940, the 28,676-ton *Champlain* was sunk off La Pallice. There were mystery fires in other big French Line vessels known and loved well by North Atlantic passengers. Seamen remembered other incidents in the past: *La Champagne*, in 1885, stuck herself almost immovably at her launching ceremony and had to be launched a second

time; and a similar mishap had occurred to *La Bretagne* in that same year. And *La Bourgogne*, also launched in 1885, had a collision in 1898 with a British full-rigged bark, the *Cromartysire*, whose bows cleaved the French vessel and sent her to the sea bed with 447 passengers and 118 members of her crew.

*La Bourgogne's* captain, a French naval officer, lashed the ship's siren lanyard around his wrist and ordered all his officers to remain at their posts . . . and all perished. Not a soul aboard the British bark was hurt.

All these had been tragic stories which somehow could never be explained rightly; they were incidents which just happened, and left a trail of mourning and suffering in their wake. Most of the vessels concerned had been moderately big ships; but it was one of the least pretentious of the French Line North Atlantic fleet that was destined to play a major part in World War I's most terrible disaster.

The freighter *Mont Blanc*, 3,121 tons, was built in Middlesbrough, England, in 1899, in the Raylton Dixon yards. She was made for a Rouen company, whose house flag she wore for a comparatively short time before the French Line bought her for general cargo purposes. She was a well-built, stout little freighter, well able to battle her passage through the worst weather the North Atlantic or any other ocean could muster. She might well have gone on serving her owners usefully for many a long year, but for the war; she did, in fact, play her gallant though insignificant part during the first three years of that world holocaust, carrying supplies to Europe from American ports.

Ten years before *Mont Blanc* was built, in 1889, White

Star Line placed their order for a North Atlantic vessel, scheduled to be named *Runic*, of 5,043 tons. She was constructed in Belfast yards by Harland and Wolff and for six years flew the White Star flag. In 1895 she was sold by White Star to the West India and Pacific Steamship Company, and renamed *Tampican*; she exchanged her new house flag in 1899 when her owners were taken over by the Leyland Line.

In March, 1912, Leyland disposed of the vessel to H. E. Moss and Company, who in turn, twelve months later, sold her to the South Pacific Whaling Company, of Christiania. Without altering her construction externally, they converted the ship into a tanker to carry whale oil, and rechristened her *Imo*.

*Mont Blanc* loaded a cargo of 5,000 tons of high explosive in New York on the last day of November, 1917, battened down her hatches, pulled out, and headed for Halifax, Nova Scotia, where a dozen freighters were to assemble for convoy across to Europe. *Mont Blanc* made a fair weather passage right up to the time she reached Bedford Basin, passing through the narrows leading from Halifax to the convoy assembly point.

*Imo*, operating under the orders of the Belgian Relief Committee, was also bound for the convoy assembly point. The two vessels sighted each other coming up toward Bedford Basin. Both were proceeding at half speed; they were separated by a distance of nearly two miles, *Imo* apparently heading toward the Dartmouth shore line of the Basin, over to the north, at a position where the harbor narrows to rather less than a half-mile width. The two vessels proceeded on course . . . and then on-lookers and dock workers on the waterfront realized that

nothing but a split-second miracle could prevent a collision.

Aboard *Imo*, her master acted instantly, rung down his engines, stopped his ship, then reversed her with every ounce of power her engineers could produce. But the ship was light, carrying little heavy cargo, and the procedure had the effect of bringing her bows around to port—toward, instead of away from, the starboard bow of *Mont Blanc*. And up in the forward hold of the French freighter was a cargo of picric acid; astern of that were a couple of holds packed with T.N.T.

According to scientific calculations, picric acid cannot possibly detonate, or flame, merely on impact, but T.N.T. most probably would. That consideration flashed through the mind of Captain le Medec, master of *Mont Blanc*; he therefore decided to hold his present course, despite the obvious collision that threatened, hoping that the *Imo* would strike his ship somewhere around that portion containing the cargo of picric acid. Less than two minutes later *Imo* crashed into the side of *Mont Blanc*, cutting into her body nearly a third of the way between her deck and forward hold. So far, this was the inescapable course Le Medec had aimed at; so far, his plan had been successful. The next operation would be to get the two ships apart safely and head for the shore; if this were not possible, then they might lie there, locked as they were, until escorting British and Canadian Navy ships reached them and gave assistance. But Captain le Medec had forgotten, when he decided how that collision should take place, that stevedores in New York had loaded twenty barrels of benzol on his forward deck.

Only moments after the impact, the contents of those

barrels, broached by the bows of *Imo*, were beginning to flow. They reached the picric acid, lighted it, and sent giant clouds of black smoke rolling skyward from *Mont Blanc*'s torn body. Aboard *Imo*, her captain reversed his engines and backed away with every ounce of speed, heading for the Dartmouth shore line.

No fire alarms were sounded aboard *Mont Blanc*; there was no need, for no man aboard required telling what was happening. Now, and until they had quenched those belching flames, the only thing required of them was the courage to stay where they were and fight that demon. So they fought until they could fight no more; until it became grimly clear that the more they fought, the tighter grip the fire gained on their ship. From his bridge, Captain le Medec issued his next order: "We can never hope to check this; all we can do now is to scuttle the vessel." That at least would smother the creeping menace.

Ashore, along the waterfront and from every vantage point around Bedford Basin, and aboard every other ship lying there, men could see their French comrades driven back, step by step, by the fiery menace. Then, before anyone aboard *Mont Blanc* made any attempt to sink the vessel, there was a concerted stampede for the lifeboats. They lowered them, climbed aboard, laid hold of the oars, and pulled, panic-stricken, for the Dartmouth shore. Who was there, that black day of December, who might blame the men who did that? The preservation of human life must always come first in a man's thoughts.

Aboard the British cruiser HMS *Highflyer*, and the Canadian HMCS *Niobe*, fire-fighting squads were mustered as the two escort vessels at speed raced toward



*Mont Blanc*, deserted now by her crew. They, safely ashore, were racing into nearby woodlands, hoping there to escape the full effects of what they feared would come at any second.

*Highflyer* was alongside *Mont Blanc* when the freighter and its cargo exploded; and when it happened, pandemonium was let loose. One hundred and twenty miles distant, in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, windows were shattered; Richmond, at the northern extremity and the oldest part of Halifax, was utterly wiped out, and fire ravaged everything left standing of what had been a prosperous community. Down in the harbor, five ships assembled to form convoy were severely damaged, with two-thirds of their crews killed outright. And a tug which had been steaming from ship to ship was hoisted bodily from the water, carried swiftly into the shivering atmosphere above, and deposited on a nearby wharf.

A vast tidal wave swept across Bedford Basin, climbed to a height of nearly fifteen feet, obliterating everything in its path, receded and dropped the water level a distance of nearly twelve feet. Ashore, over toward Dartmouth, lay *Imo*, her deckhouses gone, her four masts fractured and toppled into the water, her single tall funnel a mere mockery of what it had once been. Her crew were missing.

Late that day they tried counting their casualties. Commander Triggs, of HMS *Highflyer*, lay dead with twenty of his officers and men; ashore, the number of killed, injured, and missing was quite unknown. They had started a count but had quit; they were unable to go on. It was terrifying, frightful.

Throughout the United States and the British Commonwealth funds were started, relief committees were formed; rescue parties poured in, converging on the stricken town, from neighboring provinces, from New York, from Boston. Thirty million dollars became readily available for relief and reconstruction work. And, over in Europe, World War I went on. Halifax, key point in North America, was wanted as it had never been wanted before; and within five days of that terrible explosion Halifax was back at work, back playing its vital wartime part. Almost to the hour, five days later, an eastbound convoy of forty ships pulled out, headed for ports in Europe. A world war had to be won; every hour counted.

A preliminary inquiry placed the blame for the disaster squarely on Pilot McKay, who was aboard *Mont Blanc* immediately before the collision, and upon Captain le Medec; he and the captain of *Imo* had blamed each other from the start, and, in fact, the French Line filed suit in an admiralty court against the South Pacific Whaling Company, as owners of *Imo*.

Damages were assessed against the French Line; McKay and Le Medec were held to have totally disregarded the seafarer's rule of the road, and both men were arrested and charged with manslaughter, though later McKay was discharged on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence to establish criminal negligence. The French Line was recommended to cancel Le Medec's captain's license and to deal with him in France, under French law.

In and around Halifax they checked and cross-checked their appalling tallies. Eventually, the figures were issued

officially: fifteen hundred dead, two thousand missing, eight thousand injured, three thousand houses and business premises wiped out. In all, the loss of property alone stood at thirty million dollars.

What happened to the 5,043-ton *Imo*? Somehow she managed to make her home port, under her own steam, there changed ownership once again, and was rechristened *Guvernoren*; she steamed out on her last voyage in October, 1921, her destination the Antarctic. Less than twenty miles from the lonely Falklands she ran aground in heavy fog, broke her back, and became a total loss. But every man jack among her crew was saved and taken to safety by whale-catchers, finally brought into Liverpool aboard the Pacific Steam Navigation Company's liner *Orcoma*.

Many a notable ship in the past proudly wore the house flag of the French Line, and many were the strange incidents which beset some of those fine vessels. But that is the way it has always been—with ships, and with seafaringmen.

## 18.

### "Help Us, or We Perish!"

RADIO OPERATOR P. B. Maltby eased himself in his chair, stretched his arms, and reckoned he would not be sorry when this particular trip was over and done with. This was the forenoon watch, eight to noon, and seven bells would not be sounded for another couple of hours or so. Meanwhile the North Atlantic was being particularly spiteful.

For the past few hours the wind had piled up in strength until now a tremendous northwesterly gale was blowing, and monster seas ran at, against, and right under his ship, the Cunarder *Carmania*. Slowly the hands of the radio room clock moved around until the hour of ten registered. Maltby brought those stretched arms of his abruptly into action as a call filtered out of the Atlantic air and into his phones . . .

"SOS SOS steamship *Volturmo*, 49.12 N 34.51 W Numbers 1 and 2 holds blazing furiously please come at once."

Maltby replied. A moment later he was on the bridge, passing the call to Captain Barr.

Flying the house flag of the Royal Line, bound from

Rotterdam for New York, *Volturmo* carried 657 souls, passengers and crew. Six hundred of them were emigrants seeking a new home—ordinary folk, most of them of very limited financial circumstances, ready to make this North Atlantic voyage under any conditions to achieve their goal.

Down to his engineers went Captain Barr's urgent request: "Give me every ounce of steam available; double the stokehold and engineroom watches."

*Carmania* had been making a steady fifteen and a half knots, driving her passage through mounting seas and that nor'westerly. It had been tough going, but now it was going to be a lot tougher. Slowly her revolution indicator crept around; slowly her screws bit harder into those gray-green, frothing seas astern of her; slowly speed was increased until the liner plowed her way in the direction of the burning emigrant ship at twenty knots. To her care were committed, now, the lives of more than six hundred folk out there, aboard a ship which was fast becoming a blazing torch, lighting the North Atlantic for miles around her.

Maltby sent out his call to every ship anywhere in the vicinity, telling them all he knew about *Volturmo* and her distress. Then, as *Carmania* raced on her errand of mercy, he contacted radio operator Seddon aboard *Volturmo*, and bit by bit pieced together the fearful story.

Shortly after seven that morning, Seddon told him, flames were discovered in the forward part of the ship, and at once her captain ordered him to transmit a call for help; first to reply to that call was Maltby, in *Carmania*. Minute by minute, fanned by the rising wind, those flames were spreading, taking a grip on the doomed emi-

grant ship, stretching hungrily along her length. It was terrible, Seddon said.

Seddon's signal weakened. And *Carmania* raced on, her main deck, despite weather conditions, now becoming crowded by passengers to whom news of the disaster had filtered through. Wrapped against wind and driving spume, they stood around in small groups, talking in whispers, scarce daring to raise their voices at a time like this. Fire? Fire, they said to each other, unbelieving—and with a wind of this force fanning it every moment to increased fury! That was a monstrous thought. And, aboard a blazing ship, more than six hundred fellow men and women . . . maybe children . . . bound to be children, of course, in a ship packed with emigrants. Whole families, God help them all.

When Maltby received *Volturmo's* first stricken call for help, *Carmania* had been seventy-eight miles distant; in normal weather a liner must make good going of it to clip distance and time; in weather like this it would need more than just good going. Down below, in her engine room and in her stokehold, firemen, trimmers, greasers, and engineers fed her great furnaces, shoveled in coal until they knew she was driving ahead as never before. And they drove her so hard that *Carmania* covered those seventy-eight turbulent miles in four hours. When they reached *Volturmo* she was a smoking furnace, right from her fo'c'sle head to just forward of her funnel. She lay there like a vast torch in a trough; she never seemed to rise on those mile-long combers that raced across the North Atlantic toward her.

Barr nosed his big ship as close as he dared, and ordered a boat to be lowered. He took *Carmania* to within one

hundred feet of the flaming ship, the liner rolling heavily—far too heavily for Barr to try passing a hawser aboard *Volturmo*, in the hope that he might take her in tow before fire-fighting could start. But, even had he managed to get a hawser linking the two ships, it would have been for minutes only, no more than that. The strongest cable would have snapped like sewing cotton in seas like those; and the use of a bosun's chair to try taking those panic-stricken passengers off was patently impossible.

Over there, aboard *Volturmo*, men, women, and children crouched in terror. Aboard *Carmania* someone screamed, and a male passenger moved forward toward the liner's bridge.

"There are a dozen of us here; we're ready to help man a boat and do all we can. We can't just stand around, safe aboard this liner, and watch those stricken souls over there. *We can't!*"

From *Carmania's* crew volunteers stepped forward, manned the lifeboat, lowered away, dipped down into a vast trough, rode it, emerged on the crest of a monstrous sea, and pulled at their oars with everything inside their bodies. They pulled until they fetched their rescue boat right under the tall sides of that floating pyre—and they were picked up by a great sea, thrown back, and almost overwhelmed. But they tried again, and yet again. They tried for a full two hours to make physical contact with *Volturmo*, and then were forced to call it a day, to admit defeat by those raging seas. All they had been able to do was keep watch for any survivor who had leaped from the burning ship and still lived in those seas.

Somebody aboard *Carmania* yelled: "Good heavens, look!"

A thousand eyes turned in the direction the passenger was pointing. And over there, climbing one of *Volturno's* masts, a man crawled hand-over-hand, slowly, deliberately, trying to reach the aerial of the stricken ship, earthing so badly that her signals were half-obliterated. They watched him go; watched him make temporary repairs; watched him turn his body to descend to the blazing deck. But the screaming winds tore at him, wrenching his fingers, numbed by now, from their grip. They saw him let go his hold, fall a full twenty feet or more down to that deck, and lie there motionless. He had been *Volturno's* second officer. And he had done his vital job.

Her voice came on the air again: "*Carmania* will you please keep lookout for two of our lifeboats nothing you can do here to help us."

So *Carmania* steamed away, searching the area while weather conditions steadily worsened. Then *Volturno* called the big liner again: "Please return to us as quickly as you can we may go down any moment our plates are buckling from intense heat."

So *Carmania* put about, raced back to the burning emigrant ship, came close, lowered half a dozen rafts, and watched them float away to be destroyed by giant seas. There was nothing more she could do but stand by.

Then out of the darkening afternoon steamed the Norddeutscher-Lloyd liner *Grosser Kurfurst*, her radio operator Gericke talking in robust German as he came. Five minutes later came the German ship *Seydlitz*, with radioman Reich four-square at his transmitter, bidding *Volturno* be of good heart, for help was on the way. They were here and ready to lend a hand.



Out of that gray afternoon they came, the skies above them lit by the vivid colors of those leaping flames; in all their international glory they came, those rescue ships—Atlantic Transport's *Minneapolis*, with radio operator H. P. Hunt adding his voice to the growing chorus; Furness Withy's *Rappahannock*, and Dan O'Sullivan at his transmitter urging *Volturno* to "stick it out, old man, we're here with you all." And then, into the assembling armada, came the Russian Steam Navigation Company's *Tsar*; and International Mercantile Marine's big *Kroonland*, radio operator J. H. Jeppesen calling a message of encouragement; and the French Line's *La Touraine*, with her radioman Quevillon giving his quota of cheer.

Through those giant seas they came, the tearing winds failing utterly to hold them back; they came through that howling gale, their bows cleaving the seas disdainfully, their funnels belching black smoke, their seamen instantly ready to launch boats and make that nightmare trip across to *Volturno*. They closed that stricken ship—nine North Atlantic liners, wearing the national colors of five different countries. What did it matter—what *could* it matter, anyway—if the men aboard those nine ships knew little or nothing of the other man's native tongue; of his way of living; of his country; of his creed, class, or caste. They were seafaring men, the lot of them, and fellow seamen had called for their help. Nothing else mattered.

The day neared its blazing end. Night closed in, and the hours crawled by in agonizing procession. That gallant armada and the stricken vessel they had raced to succor, in less than six hours that afternoon and evening, drifted together a distance of more than forty miles; yet not one of those rescue ships could do anything to aid

*Volturmo* or those aboard her. The seas made it impossible. The screaming winds made it suicidal. It was, said one passenger aboard *Carmania*, "one of the most heart-rending sights we ever saw. To us, that ship over there was just one great mass of flames, stretching half her length; and we were out there, surrounding her, incapable of doing anything at all."

Aboard *Volturmo*, deckwork was crashing and tumbling; a vast wave lifted the ship, held it there, and dropped it. Across a twisted rail went a figure, then another, a third, striking the leaping seas, disappearing into the welter of water. Aboard *Carmania* and every other ship standing by, men and women cried openly; little groups of passengers fell to their knees and prayed. And then, shortly before nine-thirty that night, flames burst through amidships from *Volturmo*'s bunkers and engine room, and were followed an instant later by a vast explosion. Nobody could live after that, folk told each other.

But as the flames flared higher, lighting the nightmare scene, folk still lived; hundreds of them, huddled as far away as possible from the searing, creeping, leaping menace.

Five minutes later, aboard *Volturmo*, radio operator Seddon switched his transmitter to the emergency batteries, steadied his body in his chair, and sent another call: "For God's sake, help us, or we perish."

Despair was writ giant-sized in those eight poignant words; despair, and the agony of human beings suffering to the very limit of endurance and beyond. But nothing could be done to help them—not a thing. And then, aboard *Carmania*, Captain Barr sent word to radio oper-

ator Maltby: "Make a call. Ask is there an oil tanker anywhere near us. Hurry."

So Maltby sent the message out into that fiendishly colored night sky and beyond, and prayed to God that somewhere, some ocean-going tanker would receive it and answer—some tanker having a bad time keeping herself on an even keel in a sea like this; for a ship of that type, full-laden, lies low in the seas, almost like a submarine. It was now ten minutes before midnight.

If that call were answered by a tanker within a radius of fifty miles by dawn, they might yet do it. Without the help of succouring oil, poured on these leaping, hungry seas, there could be no possible hope. Every soul aboard *Volturmo* must perish. That was the inescapable truth.

"This is *Narragansett*." The three words were coming out of the night skies crystal clear, and slowly. "*Narragansett* here oil tanker what is the trouble please"

Maltby told the unknown ship, tersely, briefly.

"*Narragansett* okay *Carmania* yes we can come with the milk in the morning."

Maltby asked the tanker her exact position; she replied: "We are some seventeen hours steaming from your position, but have increased speed."

Maltby asked: "Can you please make it an hour or two earlier?"

And the tanker answered: "Okay, we will do *more* than our best. We will be with you all by five o'clock."

So she reached them, coming out of the grim, bleak dawn that Friday morning, October 10, 1913, her twin propellers threshing the seas, her bows cleaving them apart, thousands of gallons of oil in her long, stout body.

She took up her position a trifle to windward of *Volturno*, opened those oil tanks of hers, poured two giant streams of lubricating oil on the maddened seas, and quieted them into smooth, harmless swells. And across that quieted stretch of sea the rescue ships closed with *Volturno* and went into instant action. By nine in the morning they had snatched 521 passengers and crew from threatened death by fire.

Far into that day those nine North Atlantic liners of five different nationalities searched the surrounding seas in ever widening areas for a sight of *Volturno's* missing lifeboats carrying the folk who had got away from that blazing vessel twenty-four hours earlier. But they sighted nothing. They had died somewhere out there in those mountainous seas. But 521 who had sailed out of Rotterdam with those dead now lived. Their lives had been spared, first by the miracle moderating of that violent gale at a time when hope of making any rescue was almost given up, second by the courage, the magnificent seamanship, the co-operation, of that international rescue squadron. That was what had counted most.

# 19.

## *"Unsinkable" Ship*

FROM the days of the Pilgrim Fathers, the North Atlantic was always the most important field of maritime adventure; supremacy on these three thousand miles of ocean down the centuries remained the coveted prize of seafaring nations; every country made mighty efforts to overwhelm competitors with its ships and its seamen.

Traffic on the North Atlantic to the turn of the nineteenth century was an American monopoly; year after year, in those spacious days of canvas, the advantages enjoyed by America were vast. Her shipbuilders claimed world renown; her shipowners sent their tall wind ships roaming the world's seas. They were men like Elias Hasket Derby, of Salem, who opened the trade to Cape Town and St. Petersburg, and whose ships bore the flag of America into Bombay and Calcutta; like the New Bedford foundling, christened Preserved Fish, who founded and operated with success his famous Swallow-tail Line of Liverpool racing packets; like Isaac Wright, the Long Island Quaker, who owned the Black Ball Line of clippers.

But then came steam; not until then, with British subsidy to Samuel Cunard, was American supremacy seriously challenged; and this at a time when increased trade everywhere demanded increased shipping to carry it.

When steam came at last between the two worlds, sailing ship owners and sailormen claimed that it was doomed to failure. Their opinion was staunchly backed by Dr. Adonysius Lardner, in Britain, who explained to the British Society as a leading scientist: "And as to this project which has recently been announced, of making a voyage by steam-driven ship from Liverpool to New York, I have no hesitation in stating that it is perfectly chimerical. They might as well talk of making such a voyage by steamship from New York or Liverpool *to the moon!*"

But, to give them all the lie, a 703-ton, three-masted topsail schooner fitted with paddlewheels, the *Sirius*, flying the flag of the British and American Steam Navigation Company, sailed from Cork on April 4, 1838, with forty passengers, battled through ferocious weather, and steamed triumphantly past Sandy Hook on the evening of April 22. She had steamed and sailed her perilous way across those three thousand miles in eighteen days ten hours, at an average speed of 6.7 knots. She was followed a few hours later by the four-masted 1,340-ton paddle-wheeler *Great Western*, of Great Western Steam Navigation Company, an offshoot of the Great Western Railway.

This was the steam challenge American sailing ships faced—and had no idea how it could be overcome.

Cunard's first North Atlantic steamship, the 1,154-ton, Clyde-built paddlewheeler *Britannia*, pulled out of Liverpool on July 4, 1840, and reached Halifax in twelve days

ten hours, averaging 8.5 knots throughout the trip. Then she went on to Boston, where Cunard himself at a public dinner in his honor told guests: "This vessel will sail from Liverpool with precise regularity, and will shortly be joined by other Cunard steamships until they cross the North Atlantic with the precision of a huge pendulum."

American politicians were supremely unhappy; American shipowners and sailormen were despondent. The day of the Yankee clipper was over and done with, for all time. America meant to retaliate; cost would not be considered; Congress claimed America must have *speed* on the North Atlantic. "Extraordinary speed," said Senator Bayard, of Delaware, "against which neither Britain nor any other seafaring nation in Europe *can ever hope to compete*."

Congress selected Edward Knight Collins for their champion; but the Collins Line was destined to become a failure. Within the brief period of ten years two of its finest steamships were lost, Congress withdrew its subsidy, and the surviving vessels were seized by creditors and sold to help cover debt. And once more Samuel Cunard was undisputed master of the three-thousand-mile ocean trade. Cunard carried the mails, and that was his strongest point on the North Atlantic.

Then came competition from other directions. Europe, stricken by revolution and famine, had thousands of homeless folk who wanted peace, who were willing to pay every penny they possessed to cross the seas to the New World. This mass emigration meant more and yet more ships; and the immigrant trek from Europe to America, a mere trickle in 1846, reached flood proportions by 1857.

To carry the increased traffic new liner companies were established, and Cunard faced new competitors: Ocean Steam Navigation Company, New York and Havre Steam Navigation Company, Vanderbilt European Line, New York and Bremen Steamships, American Steamship Company, L'Union Frégate Transatlantique, Compagnie Franco-Américaine, Compagnie Transatlantique-Belge, Inman Line, National Line, and Guion Steamship Company. And as each new ship came into service, the cry was heard for speed. Nothing else would suffice; nothing else mattered much. Meanwhile Cunard's "pendulum" was swinging back and forward across those three thousand miles of ocean with supreme and amazing regularity. Nothing could touch it.

This, said Cunard's competitors, looked like a neck-and-neck race; and the goal was utter and complete supremacy. Nothing less than that could possibly do; and to achieve supremacy, ships must have speed—hitherto unheard-of speed. For these were boom days in ocean traffic, and every ship that could snip a few hours off the voyage came one step nearer achieving that supreme goal. The race was to kill not only companies but ships, seamen, and emigrant passengers as well. Still the cry went up for bigger, faster vessels, and liner companies on both sides of the Atlantic literally chased each other out of existence; every extra knot some ship managed to achieve was another nail in the coffin of some competing ship-owner.

What could it possibly matter if the Atlantic, three thousand operative miles of it, was plagued by vicious seas, more-than-vicious winds, blankets of impenetrable fog, and at times the threat of ice that came down silently



from the far north? These were hazards to be expected and overcome; these were things seamen just took in their confident stride. Ice? queried the speed-crazy. Seamen were there, in a ship equipped to take soundings; to detect ice, therefore, all a seaman need do was lower a line, perhaps get the sea's temperature, or as near as made no difference; and, in the final test, use his own nose and smell it out. It was as simple as that. Apart from the occasional lump of ice, they said, what on earth was there on the Atlantic to be feared? They forgot, or never knew, that the North Atlantic was liable to produce without warning almost anything: ground swells, humped seas, tearing winds, fog, ice.

In all probability it was ice which sunk the liners *President* and *Pacific*, without trace, in the mid-1800's. It was largely ice, too, that wiped out more than fifty other vessels sailing between Europe and America, and with them more than six thousand passengers who embarked in those ships hopefully, without many cares in the world. And with each fresh casualty, as the death roll rose, on both sides of the North Atlantic men shook their heads, ready to cry "Enough!" For they were convinced that speed was not worth the fearful cost. But, despite everything, the race went on.

So in the 1860's the steamship came of age; the days when an Atlantic crossing in a steamship was regarded as a highly hazardous adventure now belonged to the past. Time had become increasingly important; and time demanded still more fast ships; mails, trade, passengers daily increased.

In 1837, in the tiny harbor of Maryport, Cumberland, a youngster was in the habit of sitting on an upturned

cask, whittling away at a piece of wood, shaping it as a ship, now and again watching seamen working nearby. He was Thomas Henry Ismay, son of a shipbuilder in a small way of business. In 1853 young Ismay left Maryport, reached Liverpool, started indentures with Imrie and Tomlinson, shipbrokers, made one voyage to South American ports, then returned to Merseyside to open his own small business as shipbroker. Like the up-and-coming youngster he was, he "soon observed," he wrote to a relative, "that in spite of the already numerous steamship lines engaged in the North Atlantic trade here is a service that promises an increasing development which would keep pace with Britain's industrial progress." Four years later young Tom Ismay took his first difficult step.

He contacted two Liverpool businessmen, Pilkington and Wilson, whose clipper ship *Red Jacket* had earned ample dividends during the gold rush days in Australia. Ismay talked with them, told the two he liked the flag their ship wore, a red swallowtail with a five-pointed white star; liked their decision, too, to christen a ship they had recently built *White Star*, completed his negotiations, and in 1869 launched his Oceanic Steam Navigation Company. He was joined in the venture by William Imrie, with whom he had served his apprenticeship; and the management of Ismay, Imrie and Company was nominated to operate the White Star Line, its capital registered in thousand-pound shares amounting to a total of £750,000. They signed the articles of registration on September 6, 1869.

Ismay at once negotiated the construction of White Star Line's first North Atlantic steamship, to be built in Belfast yards by Harland and Wolff. She was a single-

screw vessel of 3,807 tons, christened *Oceanic*, and on March 2, 1871, she began her maiden voyage. She was to be followed soon after by five similar vessels, *Baltic*, *Atlantic*, *Republic*, *Celtic*, and *Adriatic*; and among them the small fleet notched instant success.

White Star were proud of those new ships; in British newspapers they took space to advertise them:

The new, first-class, full-powered screw steamships *Oceanic*, *Baltic*, *Atlantic*, *Pacific*, *Arctic*, *Adriatic*. Sailing on Thursdays from Liverpool, and calling at *Queens-town* on Fridays to embark passengers. Will sail as under for New York, via Queenstown, *Oceanic*, 4,500 tons, 3,000 horsepower, Captain Digby Murray, March 22. These superb steamships have been designed to afford the very best accommodation to all classes of passengers, and are expected to accomplish quick and regular passages between this country and America. The state rooms, with saloons and smoking-rooms, are placed amidships, and cabin passengers are thus removed from the noise and motion experienced in the after part of a vessel. Passengers are booked to all parts of the United States, Canada and Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, India etc. at moderate through rates. A surgeon and a stewardess are carried in each ship. . . .

And White Star, jealous of their new name, mindful of the hazards of the North Atlantic, despite the preoccupation of speed among their competitors, to all their captains issued strict instructions:

You must distinctly understand that the issue of the following instructions does not, in any way, relieve you from entire responsibility for the safe and efficient navigation of your respective vessels; and you are also en-

joined to remember that, while you are expected to use every diligence to secure a speedy voyage, *you must run no risk which might by any possibility result in accident to your ships*. It is to be hoped that you will ever bear in mind that the safety of the lives and property entrusted to your care is the ruling principle that should govern you in the navigation of your ships, and no supposed gain in expedition, or saving of time on the voyage, is to be purchased at the risk of accident. The Company desires to establish and maintain for its vessels a reputation for safety, and only looks for such speed on the various voyages as is consistent with safe and prudent navigation.

That White Star order to captains was there *to stay*; the Company intended establishing and maintaining "a reputation for safety"—nothing more and nothing less. Speed was subordinate to safety and to the comfort of all passengers the ships flying the five-pointed star were to carry, then and thereafter.

The years slipped past. In 1872, with a crossing from Queenstown to New York, in 7 days 23 hours 17 minutes, *Adriatic* set up a new speed record westbound. A year later *Baltic* made a fresh eastbound crossing time. Thereafter, between 1873 and 1891, White Star liners *Britannic*, *Germanic*, *Majestic*, and *Teutonic* challenged their Cunard rivals and snatched from them the fastest-voyage honors. And the years passed by . . .

Cunard's 31,936-ton *Mauretania* was four years old when, in 1911, White Star launched their famous Belfast-built, 46,439-ton triple-screw *Olympic* and waited with utter confidence to see what sort of performance she logged.

Cunard possessed the two specially designed Atlantic

pacemakers, *Mauretania* and the *Lusitania*, both constructed for economical operation but with speeds to guarantee a sailing every three weeks. White Star were ready to challenge these rivals. Construction of *Olympic* was started on December 16, 1908, and of *Titanic* on March 31, 1909. *Olympic* made her maiden crossing on June 14, 1911, and averaged a speed of 21.17 knots on the outward voyage, 22.32 knots on the homeward (east-bound) run. *Titanic* was scheduled to make a triumphant maiden crossing on April 10, 1912—and to show Cunard, the French Line, Germany's Norddeutscher-Lloyd, and the Hamburg-American Line just what a superb ship of her size could do when it came to achieving a new record.

*Titanic* was 852.5 feet long and 92.5 feet in beam, with accommodation for 1,034 first-class, 510 second-class, 1,022 third-class passengers, and a normal crew of 860—65 in the deck department, 320 in her engine rooms, and a catering staff numbering 475. She was a triple-screw ship, two of them driven by triple-expansion engines installed in two engine rooms separated by a watertight bulkhead, the third coupled to a low-pressure turbine driven by exhaust steam from reciprocating engines. All told, they developed 34,000 horsepower; the turbine alone made 16,000 horsepower, the largest low-pressure marine turbine ever constructed. Steam would serve the machinery and ship from twenty-four double-ended and five single-ended boilers designed for a working pressure of 215 pounds per square inch. Three of *Titanic*'s funnels were to be used as uptakes, the fourth as an engine room ventilating shaft.

Tall, bearded, square-shouldered, a typical Western Ocean express ship man, Captain E. J. Smith was given

command of *Titanic*. At Merseyside, Southampton, New York, and Boston, everybody who was connected with shipping knew Smith, rated him a grand chap, reckoned there was nobody quite like him on the Atlantic run. Time and time again New Yorkers had watched admiringly as he brought *Majestic*, his previous command, through those intricate channels, all out, at full speed, judging his distances to a fraction of an inch, ordering just that touch of her helm to heel the big liner over as she sped on her way at the start of each voyage. Yes, E. J. Smith was a seaman to his capable fingertips; he had proved that commanding both *Majestic* and *Olympic*; now he was to be given command of White Star's well-publicized *Titanic*. A high honor for any man; and what a superb liner she was.

There were a thousand essential items to be attended to before that maiden voyage: stores to go aboard; testing every single part of her equipment; getting documents signed by a score of different inspectors; then taking her out for trials; taking over the ship from her builders; taking her carefully down to Southampton, confident that here was a giant that was going to excite the imagination of travelers and sightseers in Britain and the United States. And with those two "wing screws" and her third propeller—she was the first ship ever to be fitted with that third screw—E. J. Smith would be able to handle her even better than he had handled his previous commands. *Titanic*, they said, "would have a wonderful, a remarkable turn of speed."

There was one small, insignificant item among the stores *Titanic* took aboard before she set out for Southampton, one of those items the average seaman at any time

reckoned might easily be dispensed with. Just a matter of revolvers and ammunition. In the merchant service guns were unnecessary; guns had never been needed afloat since those days they called "the Bloody Forties" on the North Atlantic, when at times crews took it into their heads to be "awkward," and a skipper, as a last resort, was forced to call a pistol to his assistance when fists failed to quell the activities of would-be mutineers among the disgruntled hands. So who, in the name of heaven, expected a ship like *Titanic* ever to get into some sort of extreme jam, when her officers would need to take pistol in hand, crook one finger around the trigger, and pull? It was absurd. It was fantastic. It just could not happen, and the occasion would never arise. But those revolvers, that ammunition, were included in her store list, and they had to go aboard, even though they would become mere ornaments in the miniature armory. Only that; they would never be issued, never be used.

At Southampton, last-minute changes had to be made among *Titanic's* senior officers; *Olympic* was laid up, so a chief officer was readily available. That chief officer, with his past experience, would be useful aboard *Titanic* during her shakedown trip; so the temporary arrangement was made. *Olympic's* chief officer would make that maiden voyage in *Titanic*, with First Officer Murdoch, Lightoller his immediate assistant, David Blair second; and, boss of them all, Commodore of White Star Line, Captain E. J. Smith.

Under these capable seamen, Board of Trade official surveys were carried out: lifesaving gear was tested and passed as totally adequate; distress rockets were examined and approved. Throughout the giant liner everything was

shipshape and Bristol fashion. Here was a vessel far surpassing anything yet seen on the North Atlantic run, a vessel everybody claimed to be unsinkable.

There were milling throngs around the Ocean Dock that clear, bright, windy April morning; crowds who elbowed each other to get a better look at this towering giant whose rails were already packed tight with passengers, some of them waving handkerchiefs, some holding the end of streamers linking ship and shore. Gradually, overnight and far into the dawn hours, stewards had been handling baggage, stowing it; seamen had played their part in making order out of seeming chaos. And now *Titanic* was making ready to pull out.

The moment drew near. On the stroke of sailing time, somewhere up there in the vast ship a whistle shrilled. On the dockside men eased away the gangways and lowered them gently. Ropes were cast off, one by one. Ahead and astern of the liner fussing tugs nosed in, taking the strain of the hawsers. *Titanic's* siren trumpeted thrice. Her blue peter came fluttering down. And she was off into the teeth of that fresh wind freshening stronger each moment that passed.

Across the still water of the dock, churned now by *Titanic's* propellers and the screws of the tugs, lay White Star's *Oceanic* and the American liner *St. Paul*, their rails crowded with excited folk bidding the newcomer farewell, bon voyage; and as she turned slightly, her screws ripping the dock's water, using mainly her port engine for the maneuver, *Titanic* created a suction so immense that it literally dragged *Oceanic* and *St. Paul* from their moorings.



Her passengers watched spellbound, and caught their breath as *St. Paul* came nearer, appearing to be doomed to crash into the liner. It was touch and go. But on his bridge, Captain Smith did precisely what he had always done every time his ship docked or came into dock. Like a master musician, touching the keys of some fine instrument, making it respond to his maestro's touch, he gave his ship just that minute urge she needed to avert calamity. Her port engine responded and the American vessel was eased away, out of danger, until tugs, racing in, took her in tow and shepherded her back to the dockside. It was over in a flash, though exciting while it lasted. It had proved, if proof were needed, that captain and ship were in unison—that already they had the feel of each other; that each could respond in a split second to the mood of the other.

So went *Titanic*—out into Southampton Water, out into the Channel until she felt fathoms beneath her body and could take a grip on it, out across the English Channel, to steam comfortably across to Cherbourg, her engines just idling, warming themselves up for the big trip ahead. Then she moved to Queenstown, and the Ocean Dock scene reacted again in miniature. Next day Captain Smith signaled his engineers, opened her up, and excited still more her 1348 passengers, no less her crew totaling 860. They asked each other: Would *Titanic* break every previous record for the westbound voyage? Would she plough triumphantly across those three thousand miles of ocean and reach New York in faster-than-ever-before time? Here and there, they laid bets on the prospect.

*"You must run no risk which might by any possibility*

*result in accident. . . . You will ever bear in mind that the safety of the lives and property entrusted to your care is the ruling principle."*

Champagne corks popped that night; popped with a vengeance. Stewards moved silently among passengers, catering to their every requirement. There was gay laughter everywhere, among men in faultless evening dress and women gowned in the newest styles. There were gleaming shoulders, sparkling, costly jewelry, expensive fur capes, rich cigar smoke, the perfumes of Bond Street and Rue de la Paix, flowers in rare profusion—utter and complete luxury in a luxury ship on her maiden voyage—a ship which newspapermen back in Britain had already labeled the "Millionaire's Liner."

*Titanic* ploughed ahead without so much as a tremor, with a complete absence of vibration, warming up to her task. In her giant body, seamen, stewards, firemen, greasers, engineers settled down to their individual tasks, and watches came and went as if everything ran in oiled smoothness.

In *Titanic's* radio cabin, Chief Operator J. G. Philips and his assistant Harold Bride tuned their equipment, attended to a dozen minor duties, tidied up generally. So far as Philips was concerned, his was a story-come-true of a youngster whose heart had always been set on going to sea.

Born in Godalming, Surrey, he had learned the lessons of average schoolboys at the local grammar school; when those days were over and done with, he sought and obtained work as a learner in the nearby post office telegraph section, did well, and left to join the Marconi school at Seaforth, near Liverpool, in March, 1906—al-

most six years to the day before *Titanic* pulled out from Southampton. Philips could never forget those days at "The Tin Tabernacle" at Seaforth, that corrugated-iron building where studious young men whose eyes ever searched the horizon fitted themselves for a sea career.

When he was proficient and had gained his certificates, Philips had been appointed to White Star's *Teutonic*; then for a spell to *Pretorian*, then back to White Star's *Oceanic*; and aboard *Oceanic* Philips had served and watched with admiration, bearded, bluff E.J., as every man aboard White Star liners knew Captain Smith. Twelve months before his appointment to *Titanic*, Philips had served at Marconi's high-power transatlantic radio station at Clifden. Then came *Titanic*, and Jack Philips knew he had reached the zenith of every radio operator's ambition.

*Titanic* moved through the North Atlantic comfortably, powerfully, nowhere near all-out speed; her orchestra was playing a waltz for the few remaining couples wishing to dance the day out. It was as smooth as if they had been dancing in some fashionable hotel ashore. Yet the big liner was logging her nineteen, then twenty, twenty-one and a half knots. That night, April 14, when the last of her passengers were asleep, *Titanic* was really warming up, though by no means forcing her passage. On her bridge, navigating officers, taking watch from the next man, stood together talking of the ship, of her performance so far, telling each other: "E.J.'ll take it easy this trip and next. He won't let her get the bit in her teeth, not for another twelve months or so, mark my words. But when she does that . . . just watch her! She'll go like no other ship on this run, or anywhere else."

Out in the Atlantic, in Cunard's *Carpathia*, radio operator Tom Cottam had been talking with Jack Philips, exchanging frequent signals with him throughout the day. Now the hands of the clock above his equipment pointed to 11:15 P.M. Another forty-five minutes to go, then watches would change, and Cottam could use some sleep; it had been a long, tiring day.

Out in the Atlantic too, *Californian* had been speaking with Tom Cottam, and between times with Jack Philips in *Titanic*, saying something about weather conditions; about the unusually smooth, ice-cold seas, about—ice. There was so much of the darned stuff, *Californian* had told both Philips and Cottam, that “we are stuck here, almost completely surrounded by it.” He went on that way until *Titanic* told him to clear the air, to pipe down, because they were talking with Cape Race and ice could not matter nearly so much as telling America just what *Titanic* was making of her maiden trip. Cape Race wanted all the news; and Cape Race, impatient, would have the news. So *Californian's* lone radio man—she was a one-man-radio ship—tired out too, quit his watch, climbed into his berth, closed his eyes, and went to sleep. Next time anybody called him it was going to be too late—far too late.

Up around the North Polar regions that past winter, weather conditions had been unusual, as mild as any seafaring man who knew those northerly routes or any meteorologists ashore had ever seen. Ice, glaciers of the deadly stuff, had been breaking away from the icecap in huge quantities, and as bergs, growlers, field, and float ice, had come slowly south on the ocean current. Some of that stuff had reached *Californian* and for a while

blocked her passage, packing itself closely around the ship, almost bringing her to a halt. But slowly she had nosed her way through and gone ahead.

Jack Philips knew exactly what the menace of ice could mean to any North Atlantic ship; he had had experience of it serving in *Oceanic*. That evening too, on his phones, he had heard another ship, *Mesaba*, calling all vessels in the immediate vicinity, telling them: "Ice report latitude 42 N to 41.25 N longitude 49 to 50.30 W have sighted heavy pack ice number of large bergs and field ice weather good and clear." But Jack Philips did not seem to realize the great urgency of *Mesaba's* warning, nor that *Titanic* was approaching the position from which *Mesaba* had been calling all ships. He was busy talking with Cape Race; he was a bit behindhand with other duties, with accounts which would need to be squared up before they reached New York.

He had noted *Mesaba's* message, written it carefully on his signal pad, torn off that sheet, and slipped it beneath a paperweight at his elbow. As soon as he had finished those accounts and attended to one or two other important items, he would send *Mesaba's* signal up to the bridge to Captain Smith. Meanwhile, it could easily wait.

*"You must run no risk which might by any possibility result in accident . . . The safety of lives and property entrusted to your care."*

Watches were changing in *Titanic*; navigating officers stood talking for a brief spell before relieving each other. They were saying *Titanic* was making a remarkably steady passage; that there had been an extraordinary absence of vibration; that, curiously, this very night—

more than any other they had known in the North Atlantic—there was an eerie lack of definition between the dim horizon and the darkened skies above them. They assured each other that, on instructions from the captain, the crow's nest had been warned to keep its eyes peeled. Two seamen were up in *Titanic's* crow's-nest, able seaman Fleet, able seaman Leigh, muffled to their ears in clothing, huddled together for a spot of extra warmth.

In *Titanic's* first-class smoking room, fully intending now to make a night of it, four men played poker, raising the ante hour by hour. It lacked half a dozen hours or so to dawn, and the cards tugged, hard. Elsewhere, everything was silent.

Second Officer Lightoller was going off watch ready for bed. He passed on to his relief, First Officer Murdoch, *Titanic's* course, speed, weather conditions, details of the reports they had received from other ships—five of them so far, not counting *Mesaba*—concerning ice in the area. Lightoller stepped down from the bridge, made his normal rounds, passed a word or two with the quartermaster and other men on watch, then stepped into his cabin and into his bunk. Lightoller was dead tired, and cold—perishing cold. He closed his eyes with a sigh of sheer relief and dropped into unconsciousness.

At precisely 11:20 P.M., aboard *Carpathia*, Tom Cottam stiffened in his chair. Philips was calling. And Philips was saying something about an iceberg. Out of that black night, through those mirror-smooth seas, came that vast white shape, directly in *Titanic's* path.

In her crow's-nest able seaman Fleet saw the thing, doubted what he saw, looked a second time, grabbed

the phone to the bridge, and yelled into the mouthpiece: "Ice! A berg. Dead ahead!"

In his bunk, Second Officer Lightoller felt the shock, shot out to his feet, raced for the door, flung it open, and ran out onto the deck. To port first, then to starboard; but he could see nothing. The intense, bitter cold penetrated his pajamas like knives, cutting right through to the marrow of his bones. His teeth were chattering. It was foolish to stand out there, freezing slowly. So Lightoller stepped back into his cabin; and ten minutes later the door opened.

"We've hit an iceberg." That was all Fourth Officer Boxall could say. He just stood there open-mouthed.

"I knew we'd hit something. Anything else?"

"Yes. The water's up to F deck already." And Fourth Officer Boxall went out again, closing the cabin door.

From the bridge went instant signals to every part of *Titanic*. Bells clanged; telephones shrilled; in the engine-room bridge indicators swung around to "Stop," then to "Full astern."

*Titanic's* decks were lettered from her boat deck downward—A, B, C, and so on—so that water in F deck proved, if proof were necessary now, that the giant had been holed terribly. And on her main deck, with *Titanic* already taking a slight list to port, shell ice in chunky slabs clattered down from the vast killer looming alongside.

In the *Carpathia*, Cottam heard the call Philips made: "SOS SOS CQD CQD." Cottam replied instantly. Philips came back: "Have struck iceberg come to our assistance at once position latitude 41.46 N longitude 50.14 have informed bridge."

*Carpathia* altered course, stepped up speed, and started her race toward the stricken ship. Ten brief minutes had passed. Cottam listened, and heard *Olympic* talking with *Titanic*; Philips was saying the weather was clear and calm, and adding: "Engine room slowly flooding."

In *Titanic*'s first-class smoking room the poker players stopped shuffling their cards as a gigantic shape appeared, then disappeared beyond the windows. One of the men shrugged his shoulders. Just a great chunk of ice, that was—wouldn't bother a ship this size. Wasn't *Titanic* unsinkable? They settled down again to their game. The hands of the smoking room clock registered midnight. It was Sunday.

Among her passengers, very few of *Titanic*'s complement so far knew anything about icebergs or collisions or danger. In any event, even if they had, even if by now they had come surging on deck in their scores, *Titanic* had lifeboats and to spare; boats fitted with the Wellin davit, which made launching boats as simple an operation as shelling peas in the kitchen. All that was needed was for seamen to man the handles of those davits and, presto! the boats quickly swung clear.

Captain Smith was on the bridge. And, along alleyways, stewards were moving about. Here and there, from some cabin, a passenger looked out and asked: "The ship's stopped. Why?" He was told: "That I don't know, sir, but it's not likely to be anything much." Those stewards, with the rest of the crew, knew that at no time had there been the chance for lifeboat drill; everyone aboard had been too busy, far too preoccupied. True, at Southampton they had lowered those lifeboats, tested them, and hauled them up again; but no more than that.



And, after all, whether they are stewards, firemen, trimmers, scamen, greasers, engineers, or navigating officers, British merchant seamen are expected, at all times, to think for themselves and act on their own initiative.

*"You must run no risk . . . the safety of lives and property entrusted to your care."*

*Titanic* struck that vast eighty-foot-high iceberg forward of her foremast; she was pierced in her bows; and as her engines galloped their 34,000 horsepower unchecked until they were rung down *fatal minutes later after the first shock*, driving her full weight against the huge mass, *Titanic* struck again, again, and yet again, until her side was opened in half a dozen different parts. She went on ahead, crashing herself hard against that mass of floating ice until the seas came flooding into six different compartments. She had been built and divided into watertight compartments so that she could remain safely afloat with any two such compartments flooded; she might still remain reasonably safe with three flooded; at the extreme limit, with four. But not with six.

At ten minutes after midnight Philips made another signal to all ships anywhere near, but his power was greatly reduced. Ten minutes later he was sending a series of "V's," and his signals were broken, haphazard. Five minutes later, *Carpathia* called *Titanic*, and received no reply. Then, at 12:28 A.M. Philips came on the air once more, calling "CQD CQD CQ——" and his calls ended abruptly. *Carpathia* continued calling, telling *Titanic* they were coming, firing rockets as they came; would *Titanic* please watch out for them?

In the stricken liner, from cabins and staterooms, along corridors and alleyways poured a stream of men, women,

and children, converging on the boat deck, shepherded by stewards. From the crew quarters half-naked firemen appeared on deck; they had fought their way through rising water in their fo'c'sle quarters. But nobody seemed to know *Titanic* was sinking. That would have been unbelievable.

But nothing—nothing in the wide world—could save *Titanic* now. She was doomed; she had been doomed, in fact, from the moment she continued driving herself hard against that mountain of ice.

Slowly her boats were swung out, and Lightoller, on her bridge, cupped his hands and yelled to Captain Smith: "We'll start getting the women and children off, sir?" Smith nodded. Somewhere out there *Carpathia* raced toward them; and *Mount Temple*, *Baltic*, *Virginian*, *Olympic*, were all on their way, all out, to help.

In *Titanic* women shook their heads, refused to step aboard the lifeboats, wanted nothing to do with the hazard of being adrift out there, bitterly cold and with ice all around them. From astern, from the third-class accommodation, came increasing noise, the swelling mutter of folk who could not yet realize the position of things nor their own imminent danger. And as they came on, muttering, the black skies were torn apart as a rocket flew heavenward, exploding into an arc of white light.

Someone yelled: "Lord almighty, she's going to go down! They wouldn't fire rockets if she weren't!"

And below her main deck, *Titanic's* orchestra went into the first bars of a popular dance number, an ear-catching piece of dance music. With twenty-eight folk in her, Number 6 boat fell from her davits, touched the seas and waited out there for swimmers. Her capacity

was sixty-five, and she had ample room for more. Down into those seas too went another lifeboat, and, on that sloping main deck, a fireman curled his lips and said: "Blimey, mates—that li'l lot's th' ruddy Millionaire's Special, strike me blind if it ain't!" Aboard that lifeboat were twelve first-class passengers, all very important folk.

Up above them all, up there in the darkness, an inferno of sound erupted as the mighty exhausts blew off pent-up energy from *Titanic's* bowels. Under cover of that fearful din, a shadowy group of men came running for the boats.

"Women and children *only*!" Somewhere an officer was warning the stampede. But they came on; and another officer pushed a loaded revolver into his hand, with some rounds of ammunition, and said: "Take this, old man, and use it if you've got to." A second later that revolver was barking, flinging death toward that group of panic-stricken men, stopping them in their tracks. So those "rather superfluous ornaments" that had come aboard with the *Titanic's* supplies were in use. And every time a gun spoke, it punctuated new, frightening history in the long story of the mercantile marine.

Out of the shadows came a woman, leading a Great Dane, and stepped carefully toward a waiting lifeboat; an officer barred her path, shook his head, and indicated the dog. She heard him out, nodded, and turned away, still loading that vast pet of hers; she preferred death with her dog rather than life without it. Colonel John Jacob Astor escorted his wife toward another boat, assisted her as she climbed aboard, kissed her, stepped back, tapped a cigarette on an expensive case, lighted it, and

called: "Good-by, my dear. We'll meet later." Nearby, a couple emerged from the shadows; husband and wife, married in happiness a number of years. He held out both hands, ready to help her step to safety; then, at the last moment, she drew back and turned to her man, saying: "I can't do it, dear. We've been together so many wonderful years. Where you go, I go too." They turned away and disappeared in the long shadows.

So at last all but one of the boats were eased from their chocks, swung clear, and got away. The popular dance number had stopped; the orchestra played other notes, better known by far: "Nearer, My God, to Thee." In the shadows, men and women sang the words, weeping unashamed as they sang. Nearby, in small groups, men and women dropped to their knees and prayed. And the cold, gray, ice-laden water crawled like a monster ghost slowly across *Titanic*.

As it came, the water took hold of the bodies of men and women racing panic-stricken about those tilting decks, swept them into the embrace of the North Atlantic, swept them far away until their voices weakened and were stilled forever. Then, like the stricken giant she was, *Titanic* lifted her vast stern from the seas; lifted it farther and farther until her forward funnel came down, snapped, and killed folk as it crumpled in a twisted mass of steel plating.

It was forty minutes before three o'clock; and out there in the darkness, more than half-frozen swimming men struggled toward nearby lifeboats, reaching for a finger hold, pleading with those survivors safely aboard to be helped in to safety. Some were so helped. Some, many, were not. As they came close, fear-crazed men and

women struck at those pitiable swimmers, driving them off. In one boat a heavily bejeweled woman passenger raised her right arm and brought it down with all her strength, fist clenched, into the face of a seaman already halfway to death. He cried out in agony and two other women leaned far out, took the dying man by his arms, hoisted him aboard the boat, snugged him down, and staunched the ugly gashes made by diamonds in his face.

*Titanic* now had just two pieces of lifesaving gear left; two Engleheart-type collapsible canvas boats. Slowly, they were lowered and filled to capacity; in one of them went Second Officer Lightoller. And as he went, the only officer to survive, *Titanic*, her lights still burning, massive against a dawning sky, reared herself almost upright. Then, as her lights were obliterated, her great boilers came unshipped and went thundering to the ocean bed, a hollow, rumbling roar marking their passage. Slowly the enormous rudder and the three propellers came into vague view as *Titanic* rose to an absolute perpendicular position, stayed like that a full minute, then took her final dive into the ice-cold seas and disappeared from the sight of man.

At daybreak *Carpathia* reached the scene of disaster, steamed around the area, and picked up survivors. In his radio room Tom Cottam picked up a signal from White Star's *Baltic*: "Can I be of any assistance taking some of the passengers from you will be with you about four-thirty let me know if you alter your position."

Cottam replied: "Am proceeding for Halifax or New York at full speed. You had better continue to Liverpool. Have about eight hundred *Titanic* passengers aboard us." Next, Cottam advised *Mount Temple* to re-

turn to her normal course. Nothing more could be done now, he told all ships—nothing more. At 9:45 P.M. on Thursday, April 18, *Carpathia* docked in New York Harbor. Of *Titanic*'s complement of 1,348 passengers and 860 crew, 504 passengers and 201 crew stepped or were helped ashore. Fifteen hundred and three other souls who had sailed with them from Southampton's Ocean Dock had died out there in that ice-cold darkness.

And seafaring men everywhere smiled—grim smiles they were too—at the preposterous idea that *any* ship, no matter what her shape or size, would *ever* be unsinkable.

Jack Philips had died at his post, sending calls out to the last moment, ignoring the orders of Captain Smith: "Look after yourself, Philips. You've done everything you could." Smith died too—just how or where, nobody could say. Bearded, bluff, square-shouldered E. J. Smith, well known, admired, respected in Southampton, on Merseyside, around New York, commodore of White Star, had taken his last ship out. He stayed with her to the end—and beyond.

At the subsequent inquiry, in his summing up, Lord Mersey said: "The *Titanic* collided at 11:40; the vessel seen by the *Californian* at that time. Rockets sent up were distress rockets; the *Californian* saw distress rockets. The *Titanic* sent up eight between 12:45 A.M. and 1:45 A.M. At 2:20 the *Titanic* foundered; at the same time she seemed to 'disappear' to Mr. Stone, second officer of the *Californian*." For some inexplicable reason, *Californian* did nothing; her one-man radio proved useless. Her lone operator was asleep off watch.

Lord Mersey declared: "Master of the *Titanic*, Captain

Smith, made a very grievous mistake, but he cannot be found guilty of negligence. *Titanic's* speed of twenty-two knots was excessive under the circumstances, those circumstances being the several ice-warnings wirelessly to her."

On that grim morning, the odds were not a million to one against colliding with an iceberg; they were a million to one in favor of it.

## 20.

### *Human Element*

ON THE night of July 23, 1956, George Banan, master of the Nantucket lightship—unhurriedly flashing its occulting beam three seconds in every fifteen and sounding its booming foghorn off the treacherous shoals 216 miles precisely east of New York—looked up at the lantern, then looked out into the cold opaqueness that was closing in around the ship, shrugged his ample shoulders, and reckoned that fog was about the worst hazard of all. It was worse by far than ice or gale force winds or long, vicious combers rolling in haphazardly from most directions.

Out there, a dozen and more vessels would be feeling their way carefully, prisoned like sea animals let loose in this blanket of gray-green that increased every hour. The last traces of warmth had gone when the sun, three hours back, had quit the one-sided battle against a lowering sky. Now what warmth there had been gave way before this cold, creeping menace that penetrated the outer clothing of a man, got to grips with his body, and touched the very marrow in his bones with ice-cold fingertips.



There was nothing to see out there, but plenty to hear with the continual moaning of foghorns bleating warning to everything else that moved on the water. On his radar screen Bannan had sighted a number of ships inward and outward bound, some of them, it seemed, perilously near scraping rather more than the paint off each other. Touch-and-go navigation at times like this, Bannan assured himself. He looked up again at the occulting lantern, turned away as the foghorn blasted the still air once more, and stepped below to the radar at that split second when the blips converged and merged into a jumble. Out there in that cold menace the freighter *Fair Isle* and the tanker *San Jose II* sheared into each other.

Skipper George Bannan would have muttered to anybody interested enough in shipwrecks, weather conditions, and everything that was sent to make the lives of seamen difficult: "Bound to happen. Foggy weather like this, and ships milling around regardless . . . what can you expect? One of these days, maybe, something really big will ram something else equally big, *and then*——"

Perhaps Bannan was not aware of the fact, but precisely a century earlier shipping men in America and Britain had been shaking their heads, condemning in no uncertain tones "this eternal effort at speed on the North Atlantic." They said the time had come to "call a halt to an unholy scramble to save a day or two" in the crossing of those three thousand miles of ocean where, at most times, the unpredictable can happen. And usually it does.

Tragedy had struck hard at ships in the mid-1800's, and the critics of ocean speed at that period were still shocked speechless by the sinking, in fog off Cape Race, of the

Collins liner *Arctic*, when 323 men, women, and children from a total complement of 368 had perished within sight of their homes. They recalled the words of Henry Ward Beecher at the memorial service held in Plymouth Church on Brooklyn Heights: "The mists shrouding their vast burial place . . . down, down they went . . . and those returning waters smoothed out every ripple and left the seas as if it had never happened."

In the period 1858-1867, thirty-five ships met disaster on the North Atlantic run, with 2,110 lives lost. Speed on the North Atlantic, claimed the critics, killed ships and humans; *it must stop*.

Thirty years later, after watching Britain, France, and Germany share the passenger and freight trade between them without competition from America, the United States launched its two 11,600-ton giants, *St. Louis* and *St. Paul*, and sent them steaming across to Europe, to set eastbound speed records of 5 days 22 hours 30 minutes. And that, acknowledged shipping experts on both sides of the Atlantic, *that* was certainly speed—a record, they figured, that would not be matched, for a long, long time to come, let alone beaten.

But one year later, in 1897, into North Atlantic service went the giant 12,950-ton *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, first big ship to be equipped with receiving and transmitting radio. The monster, a twin-screw, four-funneled, gleaming white "wonder ship," a glutton for fuel, clipped 7 hours 20 minutes off the American liners' record time. She claimed and secured for Germany the cream of the transatlantic trade. The battle was joined in earnest, and that meant just one thing: speed. Speed westbound or

eastbound; speed at both ends of the voyage at the turn-around.

For ten years thereafter, Britain, France, and Germany battled it out against America, and left the United States standing; Cunard, White Star, the French Line, Hamburg-America, and Norddeutscher-Lloyd had everything their own way, creating new speed records only to see them smashed weeks later. Cost was of minor importance; this was a case of national prestige.

World War I took tragic toll of a dozen and more big liners on the Atlantic run. Then, in 1932, down the slipways of the Trieste shipyards of Cantieri Riuniti dell' Adriatico went the Italian liner *Conte di Savoia*, giant newcomer of 48,502 tons, and that same year the *Rex*, 51,062 tons. Benito Mussolini was "suitably impressed," as he told his son-in-law Ciano, for this was just what Italy aimed at. These two big speedsters would be dollar-earners in a big way. That was why they had been constructed, the direct result of Mussolini's personal "persuasion" that Navigazione Generale Italia, which had ordered *Conte di Savoia*, should amalgamate with Lloyd-Sabaudo, owners of the *Rex*, and become the Italian Line, whose job it would be to earn dollars as fast and as frequently as both ships could do it.

With the end of World War II came the Big Lineup, with new, faster liners straining at the leash; for the prize was around \$500,000,000 a year, one of the most lucrative invisible experts any European country could have. And to dip their itching fingers into this vast money pool, from 1955 onward, forty-eight big ships were made ready. They included eight American-owned, eight Brit-

ish, two Canadian, one French, one Belgian, one Dutch, one Finnish, one Greek, two German, two Italian, one Swedish, and one Yugoslav. By the dawn of 1956 the North Atlantic liner war flared up in earnest. The prize was the cream of the tourist, emigrant, and passenger traffic between Europe, Scandinavia, and America, whose shipping men, aided by government subsidy, were spending millions of dollars building newer, faster ships and modernizing older vessels. Of this international fleet, eighteen new speedsters were in service, including the 55,000-ton *United States*, whose 1951 record remained unchallenged; French Line's 20,000-ton *Flandre*; Britain's two *Queens*, Greek Line's 23,000-ton *Olympia*; Holland-America's 36,000-ton *Nieuw Amsterdam*; Swedish-America's 11,000-ton *Stockholm*, a magnificent ship built in Hamburg by Bloehm and Voss; and Italian Line's 30,000-ton *Andrea Doria*.

These were top favorites of the international fleet engaged in a struggle for ocean supremacy on the world's richest trade route, the North Atlantic; and every half-hour snipped off the crossing and off the turn-around in terminal ports would be of vital importance. It was speed that mattered most. Speed meant the difference between profit and loss on any one trip.

Failure of a big liner to reach her terminal on scheduled time can conceivably upset world money markets; temperamental stage "names" have been known to become bad publicity for a liner company when a ship was delayed; less important passengers, complaining of delay, can cause as much damage once they step ashore. And at the terminal port, every big liner must be handled by longshoremen, by tugs, by chandlers, hoisting aboard

loads of coffee, tea, sugar, caviar, dried and fresh fruits, jam, marmalade, preserves, hams, bacon, crackers, butter, meat, fresh fish, poultry, fresh vegetables, potatoes, ice, milk, ice cream, yeast, matches, wines, spirits, beer, soft drinks, cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, playing cards, a host of other everyday items wanted on a normal North Atlantic crossing. At the terminal port they are all waiting: tugs, longshore gangs, chandlers' trucks. Delay in arrival might well mean pay for an extra day for every attendant service—thousands of dollars in the red. Economy and tight schedules go hand in hand, fog or no fog.

The turn-around means just that. A liner steams into port, her bows pointing one way, and when she ties up alongside, her crew get busy taking aboard fuel, stores, supplies, checking out used laundry, checking in clean; then she points her bows in the opposite direction and steams away. It is as simple as that.

At 11:20 P.M. precisely on the night of Wednesday, July 25—forty-eight hours after George Bannan, aboard the Nantucket lightship, watched on his radar screen the freighter *Fair Isle* shear into the deep-sea tanker *San Jose II*, in exactly the same vicinity, with the same patchy fog, with conditions almost identical in every tragic way, Swedish-America's 11,000-ton *Stockholm*, outward bound from New York for Stockholm with 535 passengers and 215 officers and crew, rammed her sharp bows into the Italian Line's 30,000-ton *Andrea Doria*, inward bound from Genoa with 1,134 passengers and a full crew. She sheared away bow plates between the third and fourth watertight bulkheads, ramming those pointed bows into the generator compartment, the deep fuel-oil tanks, and the garage. A gay evening, typical of any last

few hours before a liner docks, became a night of terror; women screamed, men yelled, children cried, panic-stricken. It could *never* happen. It *had*.

Said Mrs. Rose Adragna, of Pittsburgh: "I was sure that I was going to die, that everything was ended. I grabbed my daughter, but it took us a full fifteen minutes to reach the main deck." Two nuns, Sister Callistus of London, Ontario, and Sister Marie Ramond of Grand Rapids, asleep at the time of impact, dressed quietly, put on their life belts, and went to the cabin class ballroom ready to lend a hand where they could, making their way from stricken group to stricken group by crawling along the ballroom deck, soothing babies, calming weeping women. A Brooklyn engineer, Jerome Reinert, said: "It was terrible . . . until as the fog lifted we saw the *Ile de France* steaming toward us, her lights blazing. It was the greatest sight we ever saw." Two elderly Cleveland women joined with other passengers singing, to "keep up our spirits . . . and, all the time, thought of the *Titanic*."

Munargo Line's *Cape Ann*, putting about from her course, raced to the rescue and lowered all eight of her lifeboats to seek survivors from the big Italian ship. Four United States Coast Guard vessels converged on the scene, reporting by radio: "The *Andrea Doria* is listing so heavily her boats cannot be lowered." French Line's giant *Ile de France* stopped her engines, lowered lifeboats, and searched the seas. The United States destroyer *Edward H. Allen* picked up Captain Piero Calamai and seventy-six members of the crew of the *Andrea Doria*, turned about, headed for Brooklyn Army Terminal at Fifty-eighth Street and First Avenue, and reached there

around midnight. Survivors picked out of the seas paid tribute of the highest order to the crew of the *Ile de France*, which saved 753 from the doomed ship and returned them to New York less than five hours after the collision. But those survivors, with others, also criticized. Meantime, her bows stove in, the *Stockholm* put about, limped back into New York with 320 passengers and 213 crew members from the Italian liner, and put them ashore that same afternoon.

It had been a night of terror, an unforgettable nightmare night. It had begun as a gala night, with a dance in the ballroom for some, while others elected to stroll along the fog-tufted promenade decks, or stood around the ship's bars drinking nightcaps, or sat at tables playing cards, or packed ready for the shore next morning. A thousand lights blazed from a thousand portholes; there was laughter, gaiety. Then, in a split second, came panic, tears, prayer—and men who sneered at the age-old sea law "Women and children first" and tore life jackets from other passengers. There were other men, and women too, who doubted their own courage but lived to learn they were capable of quiet heroism. And ashore, sitting in his radio shack on Turk Hill Road, Brewster, New York, forty-seven-year-old businessman and ham radio enthusiast Stanley Wolff, ex-New York National Guard man, scooped the fearful story to its tragic end.

Commandant Raoul de Beaudean, master of the *Ile de France*, on his navigating bridge at the time of the collision, said: "It was so foggy I couldn't see as far as the bows of my own ship, but despite this I rang down for speed on my engines and raced at twenty-two knots for the scene. . . . We put ten of our lifeboats into the

water in less than five minutes, and luck aided us when the fog miraculously lifted as we arrived there and lay four hundred yards off the Italian ship on the leeward quarter."

Ninety survivors put their signature to a bitter statement claiming: "There existed a state of complete negligence on the part of the crew and officers of the *Andrea Doria* towards their obligations and responsibilities to the safety of the passengers in the liner. . . . When disaster struck no alarm of any sort was sounded, though at this hour many of us had retired to our cabins for the night. No instructions were given or received either through the public address system or by word of mouth that danger was imminent and that our life belts should be donned." And, added Mrs. Grace La Font, missionary of the Church of God in Egypt: "The first lifeboats lowered from the stern of the stricken liner were full of crew members. . . . We tried to ask for instructions, we didn't get any reply or help. . . . Everyone was in a panic. When we eventually reached safety aboard the *Stockholm* we were told that the first three lifeboats from the *Andrea Doria* contained only ship's personnel."

As with the *Titanic*, another "unsinkable" ship went down to the sea. At exactly 10:09 A.M. on Thursday, July 26, a trifle less than eleven hours after the collision, *Andrea Doria* rolled on her side, disappeared into forty fathoms, and reached the graveyard of a great ship in those dark depths. Like every other North Atlantic liner, she had been constructed according to the strict provisions of the 1948 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, which became effective shortly



before the ill-fated liner made her maiden voyage. She was divided into eleven watertight compartments; she had a double hull; her accommodation was subdivided so that thirty-three zones could be shut off from each other in the event of fire; she had numerous other safety devices, including radar. But the *Andrea Doria* went down, for all that, with "seven known dead, fifty-two missing, believed dead," and set in motion one of the greatest legal battles ever fought after a sea disaster, with stories that differed so wildly on basic facts that it seemed they would raise more queries than they could hope to answer.

Swedish-America Line claimed that *Stockholm* was "cruising easterly at eighteen knots with little wind and shining moon though other vessels were reporting patchy fog off Nantucket. . . . There was a haze, but visibility was good. We sighted *Andrea Doria* about two miles away and *Stockholm* altered course to allow the passing in safety, port to port. But the Italian liner suddenly . . . veered sharply to port, at undiminished speed, turning clear across the bows of *Stockholm*. . . . It was thus impossible to avoid collision."

Italian Line denied that the moon was visible, claiming: "The night was dark and foggy . . . and *Andrea Doria*'s radar indicated that *Stockholm* would pass clear to starboard . . . but her lights loomed out of the fog off our starboard bow and our ship's rudder was put hard over, while she sounded two short blasts on her siren indicating that she was altering course. No answering siren was heard from *Stockholm* and shortly after her bows struck *Andrea Doria* on the starboard side immediately ahead of the navigating bridge."

At stake were more than nine hundred claims involving \$50,000,000, all lumped together into one case; fifty lives had been lost; the Italian Line sought \$30,000,000 from Swedish-America Line, \$5,000,000 representing "lost business," the balance the value of the sunken ship. Swedish-America Line countered by suing Italian Line for only \$2,000,000—\$1,000,000 for damage, a similar sum for lost business during repairs. The *Andrea Doria's* second officer, on duty at the ship's radar screen immediately before the disaster, told a significant story in the witness box. Asked how much actual radar training he had, he answered: "None to speak of. I just picked it up. And when I sighted the *Stockholm's* blips on my radar screen I didn't plot her course because I didn't feel it was necessary."

Legal experts predicted that the trial might well take another five years, the result being known around 1961. And in Rome, Italian Line signed a contract with the builders of the lost ship for a larger, roomier, *and faster* liner as replacement. But the vital question remained unanswered: what of the human element?









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